

Ellen Pau: She Moves

May 28–Aug 16, 2026

SculptureCenter

44-19 Purves Street
Long Island City, NY 11101
+1 718 361 1750
sculpture-center.org

Ellen Pau: She Moves is the first US survey exhibition of the artist's work, bringing together fifteen selected videos and installations from the late 1980s to the present. Rather than following a linear narrative, these works trace the shifts and turns of an artistic language developed in close dialogue with Hong Kong's transformations—where personal trajectories and collective histories continually mirror and reflect one another. A self-taught artist born in British Hong Kong, Pau works across video, installation, and performance, and is drawn towards the aesthetics of abstraction and ambiguity. The electronic medium, which the artist rigorously engages, is a source from which Pau communicates a poetic and implicit political commentary. While her work is rooted in the cultural landscape of Hong Kong, it reaches beyond any single place, speaking to a shared and universal experience.

The exhibition begins on SculptureCenter's façade with three LED screens, the kind that line Hong Kong's shopfronts, scrolling through Chinese stock phrases sampled from ad language, slang, political speeches, and church slogans. The idioms in *Pledge: Bik Lai Chu #4 (#1)*, such as “十足招呼 (full services)” and “要乜有乜 (you name it),” each belong to their own register, like the signboard, the ballot, or the pulpit. Presented in proximity to phrases like “任食唔𨵿 (all you can eat),” the aggregated language complicates the way pledges and promises register in different contexts, pointing towards failures in delivery.

With Hong Kong as a central reference point, Pau has continuously trained her camera on the city, revealing its political history, colonial position, changing nature, and the stories of ordinary people. In *The Shape of Light (#2)*, video documentation of which is shown here, her work undulates at a massive scale. Pau casts an orb of light onto M+ museum's exterior wall, an enormous LED screen, which gradually gives over to a shadowed figure signing the Heart Sutra. Mirroring the teaching of the sutra, in which the Buddha Avalokiteshvara says, “Form is Emptiness. Emptiness is Form,” Pau inverts the billboard-like position of her installation, so often a site for advertisement, and proffers instead a momentary reprieve. In *Luminosity (#3)*, Pau withdraws from the urban image and the monumental screen, presenting instead a silent performance in darkness. A woman appears dressed in black, solemnly signing in a series of gestures based on Hong Kong Sign Language (HKSL). As the piece progresses, her body is gradually overtaken by shifting shadows and dimming light. By the final lines, the figure has almost dissolved completely, leaving only traces of movement and light.

Born in 1961, Pau's interest in science and imaging technology has spanned her life. At an early age, the artist's father exposed her to film cameras and recording devices, gifting the young Pau a Kodak Instamatic while she was still in primary school. Following

her family into the medical field, Pau worked at Queen Mary Hospital as a radiographer for nearly forty years. Pau's professional career contributed to her keen awareness of image making's technical dimensions. In *Operation Theatre* (#4), she manipulates footage from the hospital's surveillance camera, using a long exposure editing technique to make doctors, nurses, and patients appear semi-transparent. The constant flow of bodies, which traverse the space like a Cantonese opera stage, evoke a space shaped by illness, care and mortality, while the editing process renders the images ghostly and ephemeral. This visual motif neatly paralleled her work as a radiographer, eroding the boundary between the perceived precision of medical imagery and the abstraction of moving images. In a 2003 conversation with curator David Ho Yeung Chan, the artist declared, "I want to use footage that nobody would use, and I want to abstract the footage further."

In 1986, Pau co-founded Videotage, an artist-run collective later housed in The Oil Street Artist Village (1998)—a cluster of vacant warehouses where artists lived and worked until evacuated by the government when the land was slated for commercial sale. Emerging in the 1980s and '90s, Pau belongs to a generation of artists whose practice developed amid rapid economic growth and vibrant commercial and media industries. This period also saw the rise of self-organization in the arts, with artists building their own infrastructures. A frequent collaborator with groups like Zuni Icosahedron, an experimental theater collective, Pau took on a curatorial role, introducing video art to audiences outside her immediate scene. A self-described aspiring VJ, she also worked as a music reviewer for magazines and newspapers in the '80s, and from 2013 to 2019, contributed to shaping cultural policy for film and media arts by serving on the Hong Kong Arts Development Council.

It was from the rooftop of Videotage's office, already slated for demolition, that Pau set up a tripod and filmed the nearby seaside highway for 24 hours, raw material for her work *Recycling Cinema* (#5). Installed at SculptureCenter as it appeared in 2001, when presented as part of Hong Kong's first-ever pavilion for La Biennale di Venezia, *Recycling Cinema* tracks a single projection moving across a vast paper screen. As the projector pans back and forth, and the video image itself scrolls across the curved screen, the lonely highway is perpetually replayed—cars driving away artificially move backwards in time. Inspired by an essay in which Dziga Vertov (1896–1954) compares the camera eye to the subjective position "I," Pau's work produces a kind of listless gaze, one that neither pursues or desires a subject. "If the camera eye is a person, it is destined to be lonely..." the artist writes, "like a surveillance camera that has not found its own object of desire."

The Great Movement: Red Stock (#6) belongs to a body of work

exploring the framing of space and disorientation. In her 1996 solo exhibition *The Great Movement* at the Goethe Institut in Hong Kong, an image of an unknown lighthouse was projected onto the gallery wall while a nearby monitor showed the twitching palm of choreographer, dancer, and Zuni Icosahedron member Dick Wong. The lighthouse footage was sourced from the Government Information Service, which collected documentary films about Hong Kong from the late 19th century through the 1980s. Signifying a symbolic gesture towards guidance and uncertainty, the ominous lighthouse reflects anxieties surrounding Hong Kong's future in the wake of negotiations between Britain and China over the handover of the territory. This moment in history produced a kind of dread, an anticipation of the possibility that Hong Kong's particularity would be unmoored by a larger political body. In *Red Stock*, the outstretched hand conveys a sense of foreboding, anticipating a future in flux. The title refers to shares of Chinese state-funded companies publicly listed in Hong Kong, which echoes the sense of irresolution, as to hold a red stock was to bet on the encroachment of one economic system into another.

Turning back into the galleries, *Pledge: I Can Only Tell It to Strangers* (#7) comes into view. Created in 1996 in Copenhagen, the work's title refers to China's assurance to Hong Kong that legal, social, and economic systems would be unchanged after the handover. Pau's work from this period often responded to the psychological strain of not knowing how such a promise would land. "I am some kind of barometer," Pau once said of her relationship to the city, and in this work she literalizes the sentiment, hanging a latex cast of a person's back in the gallery (originally molded from her own body). She then projects the image of a seated woman, seen from behind—onto a dusty mirror. Positioned on the gallery floor to evoke the placement of a Chinese Earth God's shrine, the reflection travels upwards to reach the suspended latex. By passing through the shrine-like structure, the projection takes on a collective, almost spiritual resonance, before landing on the latex vestige of the individual.

In recent years, Pau has shifted her focus from specific moments in history to grand evolutionary and cosmological timescales. Her most recent iteration of the ongoing *F10ra Zero* series, *Where Have All the Flowers Gone* (#9), is an audiovisual installation which revisits the question of Hong Kong's cultural identity through the lens of biology and the genome. Generating a soundscape by assigning sonic qualities to the DNA of Hong Kong's floral emblem *Bauhinia x Blakeana Dunn*, a sterile hybrid flower that requires artificial propagation, Pau explores the shared logic of pattern formation across molecular biology, geometry, computation and ancient symbolic systems. This audio composition accompanies imagery of burning candles, which reference Hong Kong's annual candlelight vigils, held every June 4th to commemorate the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. A significant

civic tradition for decades, they have all but ceased in recent years. The diminishing agency to organize large-scale public gatherings reflects broader uncertainties surrounding the city's future. Candles, and the act of burning, then become a central motif of the video, projected using the Pepper's ghost holographic illusion. In parallel, *TV Game of the Year* (#8), a single-channel video, stages a game of "Simon Says" using televised footage of former PRC Premier Li Peng following the Tiananmen Square protests. Together, this constellation of site-specific work thus becomes a time capsule, storing traces of historical and political memory in Hong Kong, while probing at an artificiality that limits evolution, asking who—or what—determines what remains, what changes, and what is remembered as real.

An attunement to the social, institutional, and technological conditions of video art has been with Pau from the beginning. Returning to her earlier work, one finds the artist focusing, with acuity, on how the imagery of propaganda disrupts reality. Installed at the end of the arched corridor, *Diversion* (#10) montages video clips filmed in 1990 by the artist in the immense apartment building where her parents lived with archival footage from the 1960s, which shows swimmers jumping into Victoria Harbour. Pulled from the Hong Kong Public Records Office, the footage documents an annual swimming contest, which British officials hosted to promote a sense of community in their colonial holding. Made as a wave of migration swept Hong Kong after Tiananmen Square, Pau's editing turned these images against themselves: are the swimmers arriving or departing, and what are they swimming towards? The work's Chinese title (兩頭唔到岸), which means "unable to reach either bank," hints at what the English title deflects. The English and Chinese titles of Pau's work are often not literal translations of each other. This untranslatability, be it the titles or the obscure video clips, speaks to the limits of language and image.

Inspired by Hong Kong's urban landscape, Pau's *Drained* series sifts through the city to isolate intimate movements and interiors. For Pau, employing montage is not only a filmic device but a way of thinking about layering space, a tool by which overlapping mental, architectural, and cinematic interiors can be artificially constructed through digital manipulation. Produced on consumer equipment (a hand-held camcorder and a betamax with a nine-frame sport mode display) *Drained II* (#11) shows an increasingly granular female figure, sometimes walking the length of a stage, sometimes falling, but always mediated by the apparatus's grid.

Delving into more psychoanalytical dimensions of interiority, *Pledge: Bik Lai Chu* (#12), the first iteration in Pau's ongoing *Pledge* series, presents a gendered critique of private spaces. Pau pictures a woman (using the same footage from *Pledge: I Can Only Tell It to Strangers*), filmed from front and back, sitting beneath a table-like

enclosure and periodically hitting her head against its surface top, set in time to an amplified metallic score. Through the piece's title, Pau implies a constraint to femininity implicit in the expectations that surround domesticity—in Cantonese *Bik Lai Chu*, translates to "pearl" or "beauty," while Pledge, in addition to bringing up political connotations for Hong Kongers, is also the English name of a popular household cleaning product.

Nuance, and the instability of perspective, is a central exploration in Pau's work. It makes sense, then, that she was drawn to speculate on the much scrutinized relationship between legendary female Cantonese Opera duo, Yam Kim-Fai and Pak Suet-Sin. *Song of the Goddess* (#13) catches winks and looks passed subtly between Yam and Pak, who, though they never publicly acknowledged a relationship, lived together for nearly forty years. After receiving an Asian Cultural Council grant in 1991 to spend six months in New York, Pau braided footage from *Tragedy of the Poet King* (1968), starring Yam and Pak, with superimposed shots of the New York subway and a not-so-subtle scene of two women bathing.

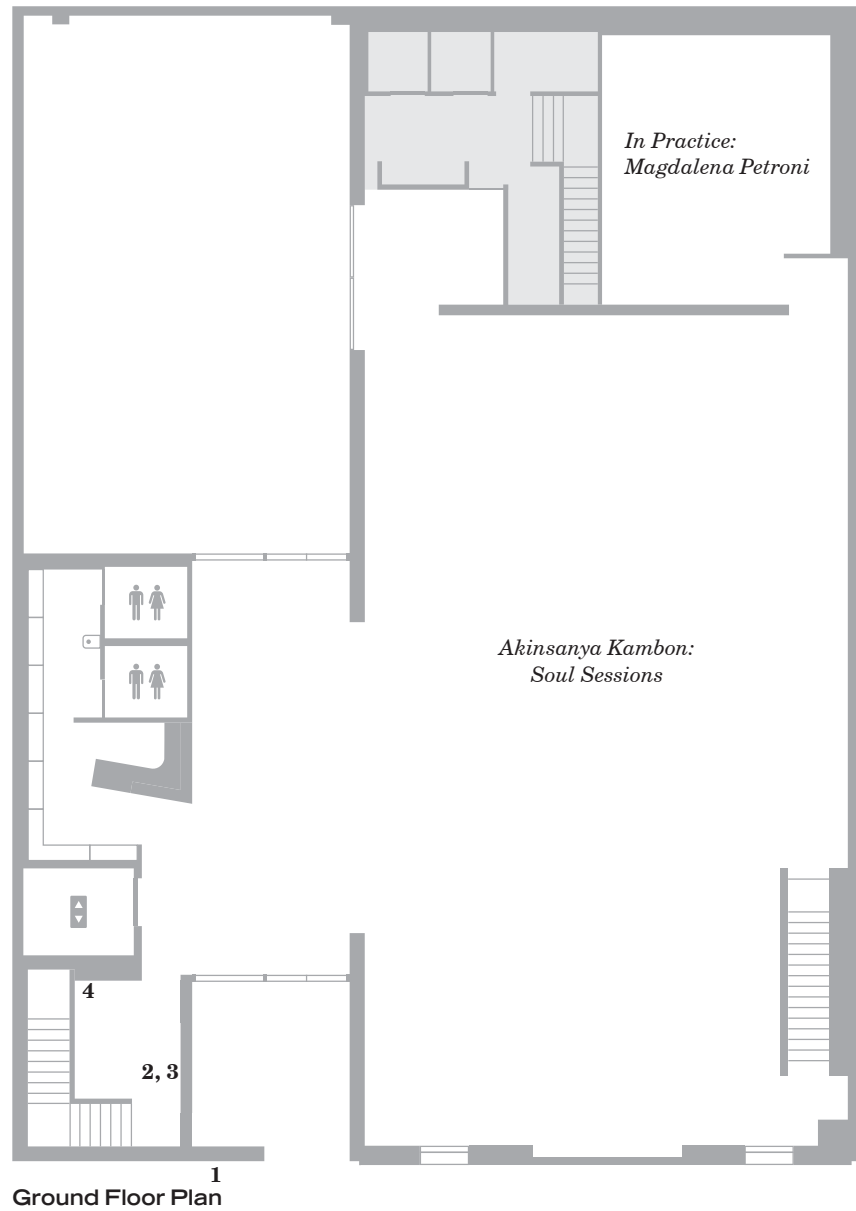
52Hz (#14), Pau's longest-duration film to date, takes its name from a "lonely" whale known for emitting calls at a frequency of 52Hz, to which no other whales appear to respond. The whale has never been seen; its existence is known only through transmissions captured by the U.S Navy's SOSUS (Sound Surveillance System), an underwater sonar network developed during the Cold War. Pau expands on the condition of being recorded, but not truly seen, through a mixture of real and fictionalized stories that unfold poetically with undercurrents of forbidden love, memory, and death. AI-generated images and ASMR sound textures are used to demonstrate how sound can intervene in narratives of loss, harnessing the medium's capacity to preserve memory and record an enduring presence.

Turning to *She Moves* (#15), an elegy to World War II, Pau trains her Video 8 camera on a water droplet against a glass window, made semi-opaque by dappled sunlight. The earliest piece in the exhibition, *She Moves* works with a slow determination, inviting the audience to project meaning onto its simple subject matter. The video is accompanied by Vera Lynn's 1939 wartime anthem *We'll Meet Again*, a treacly British ballad that promises impending blue skies to lovers torn apart by war. Juxtaposing the song's saccharine tenor and the video's melancholic pace, Pau seems to be hinting at a personal narrative but one abstracted: an experiment in editing a narrative without a protagonist.

Ellen Pau (b. 1961, Hong Kong) is an artist, curator, and educator who has played a major role in the development and promotion of Hong Kong's art scene. She co-founded Videotage, an influential Hong Kong media arts organization, in 1986, and founded the related Microwave International New Media Arts Festival in 1996. Her work has been shown in film festivals and exhibitions worldwide, including the first Kwangju Biennale (1995); the second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (1996); the Liverpool Biennial (2003); Taipei Biennial (2023); and Sharjah Biennial (2025). Her work is in the collections of M+, Hong Kong; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Hong Kong Museum of Art; and Griffith University, Nathan, Australia.

Freya Chou is a Taiwan-born curator, writer, and editor. Over the course of her career, she has worked with institutions of various scales, ranging from major museums to nonprofits. Her curatorial work, showcasing global contemporary art from the perspective of East Asia, demonstrates a commitment to bringing together diverse publics and foregrounding the rich interconnections between visual, performing, and literary arts. She is co-curator of *New Visions 2027*—the forthcoming Henie Onstad Triennial of Photography and New Media in Oslo. From 2015 to 2019, she worked at Para Site in Hong Kong as the institution's inaugural Curator of Education and Public Programs. Her notable curatorial projects include *Small World* Taipei Biennial 2023, co-curated with Brian Kuan Wood and Reem Shadid; Curatorial Council member of the 58th Carnegie International (2022); Hong Kong's participation at the 59th Venice Biennale (2022); and the 10th Shanghai Biennial (2014). Her work spans internationally, with curatorial projects at Museo d'Arte Orientale, Turin; M+, Hong Kong; Taipei Fine Arts Museum; Ilham Gallery, Kuala Lumpur among others. She has worked with several organizations on research projects and edited and contributed writing to many artist books, magazines, and exhibition catalogs.

Works in the Exhibition



Ground Floor

Exterior

- 1 *Pledge: Bik Lai Chu #4* 碧麗珠系列 4, 1995/2026
LED panels
Dimensions variable

Ground Floor

- 2 Video documentation of *The Shape of Light* 光之凝, 2022
1:58 minutes
Courtesy M+, Hong Kong

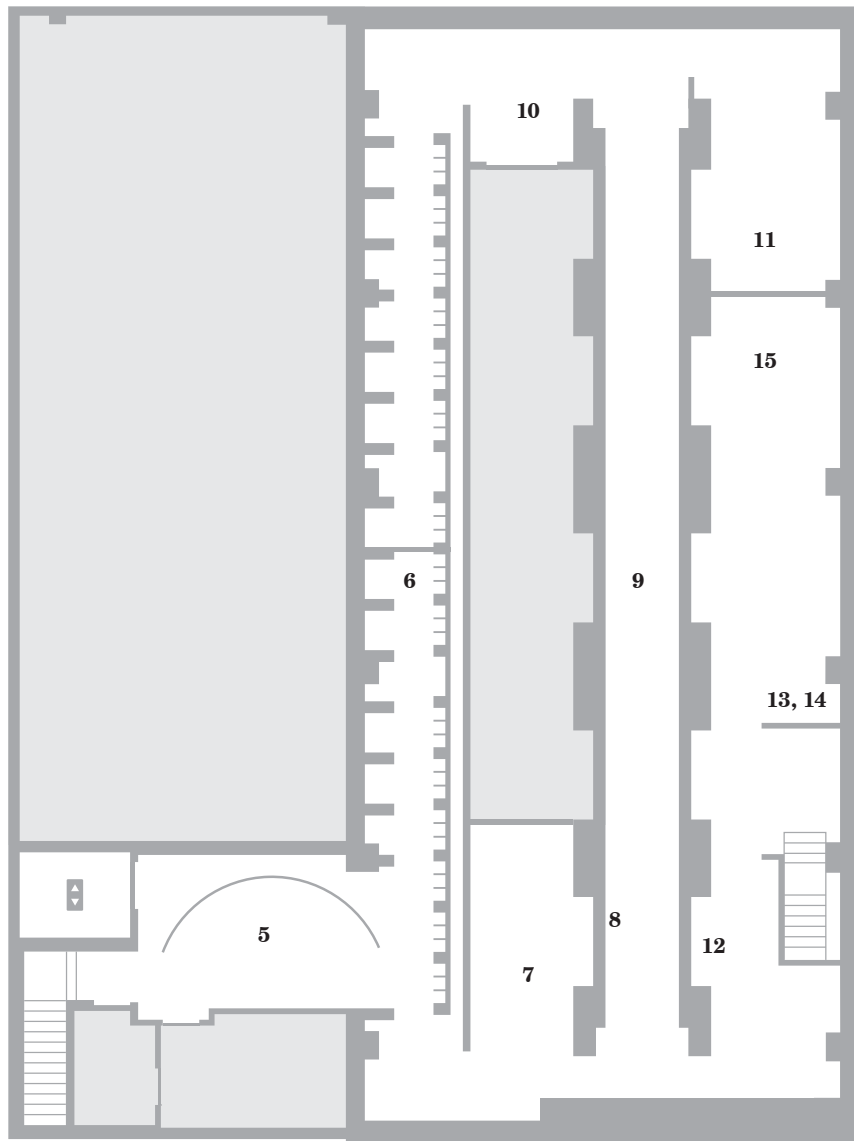
The Shape of Light 光之凝, 2022
Video (color)
15:58 minutes
Developed for the M+ Facade, Hong Kong
Courtesy the artist

- 3 *Luminosity (in progress)*, 2026
Video (color, B&M, no sound)
9:25 minutes
Courtesy the artist

Performer: Alice Poon

- 4 *Operation Theatre* 行動劇場, 1995
Video (B&W, sound)
Original format: VHS, 4:3
7:24 minutes

Works in the Exhibition



Lower Level Plan

Lower Level

- 5** *Recycling Cinema* 循環影院, 2000
Single-channel video installation (color, sound); projector, motorized pan head, tripod, paper
Original format: DV
14:17 minutes; installation dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist
- 6** *The Great Movement: Red Stock* 大運動之紅籌, 1996/2018
Single-channel video installation (color); acrylic, vinyl sticker
Original format: Hi-8
5:00 minutes (loop); installation dimensions variable
- 7** *Pledge: I Can Only Tell It to Strangers* 碧麗珠系列: 我只跟不相識的說, 1996/2018
Single-channel video installation (color, sound); found object, mirror, latex, string
Original format: Video 8
1:00 minute (loop); installation dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist
- 8** *TV Game of the Year* 估領袖, 1989
Single-channel video (color, sound)
Original format: VHS, 4:3
5:59 minutes
Courtesy the artist
- 9** *Where Have All the Flowers Gone* 有花有假, 2026
Mixed media installation with multi-channel generative sound, video, acrylic, plywood box, wax, and objects (used candles, films, print on plates)
Installation dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist
- 10** *Diversion* 兩頭唔到岸, 1990
4K video (AI-upscaled; color, sound)
Original format: VHS, 4:3
5:40 minutes
Courtesy the artist
- 11** *Drained II* 借頭借路 II, 1989
4K video (AI-upscaled; color, sound)
Original format: Video 8 edited on Betamax, 4:3
5:49 minutes
- 12** *Pledge: Bik Lai Chu* 碧麗珠, 1993/2018
Two-channel video installation (color, sound); panel
Original format: Video 8, 4:3
1:00 minute (loop); installation dimensions variable
- 13** *Song of the Goddess* 似是故人來, 1992
4K video (AI-upscaled; color, sound)
Original format: Hi-8, 4:3
6:39 minutes
- 14** *52Hz*, 2022
Video (color, sound)
15:11 minutes
Commissioned by Sunpride Foundation
Courtesy the artist
- 15** *She Moves* 她去, 1988
Single-channel video installation (color, sound); radio, curtains
Original format: Video 8, 4:3
2:41 minutes; installation dimensions variable

Sound designer: Long Man Luk
Sculptural design and technical director: Rain Chan
Video designer: Edison Juai
Wax support by Julia Bao

Except where noted, all works courtesy the artist and Kiang Malingue, Hong Kong and New York

Catalog

Ellen Pau: She Moves will be accompanied by a new catalog edited by Freya Chou. Chou most recently curated the Taipei Biennial 2023 and was responsible for Pau's last survey exhibition at Para Site, Hong Kong, in 2018. The publication includes contributions by Chou; New York-based curator and writer Lumi Tan; Lauren Cornell, Artistic Director, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, New York, USA; Pan Lu, a scholar, curator, and video artist based in Hong Kong; and Jen Liu, an artist based in New York, USA. It also includes *Conversation with the Moon*, a conversation between Chou and an AI chatbot trained on information about Pau's work and life. The catalog is published by SculptureCenter, New York, and designed by RGBK, Hong Kong (led by Tomson Chan).

Public Programs

Off-Site Program: An Evening with Ellen Pau at MoMA
Mon, May 18, 7pm

Off-Site Program: Approaching Ellen Pau at Asia Art Archive in America
Wed, Jun 3, 6:30pm

On View Concurrently

Akinsanya Kambon: Soul Sessions
May 28–Aug 16, 2026

In Practice: Magdalena Petroni
May 28–Jul 6, 2026

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Ellen Pau: She Moves is curated by Freya Chou, guest curator.

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