

Kunsthalle Wien
Museumsquartier

EN

Richard Hawkins
Potentialities
26.11.2025–6.4.2026

Since the early 1990s, Richard Hawkins (b. 1961, Mexia, Texas), has developed a singular practice based upon the intense pleasure of looking and the dynamics of desire. Employing collage as a means to structure and develop his compositions, he has described his work as ‘promiscuously referential’, quoting from the histories of artistic representation in sculpture, painting, literature and the performing arts alongside popular culture.

This exhibition brings together over 100 paintings, collages, sculpture and videos from nine distinct bodies of work produced over the last three decades. Each manifests a distinct area of obsessive enquiry and a fanatical approach that recalls the often private activity of collating ephemera into scrapbooks. The exhibition surveys a period that begins with meticulously annotated compositions of cut and pasted imagery and shows the breadth of Hawkins’s output, including ceramic reliefs, wallpapers and videos that allude to online subcultures and shared memes.

Potentialities is the first survey of Hawkins’s work in over a decade and his first exhibition in Austria. The title for the exhibition borrows an ancient concept from Western philosophy and science that refers to any ‘possibility’ that a thing can be said to have. According to distinctions drawn by Aristotle, potentiality refers to a thing’s inherent capacity to become something else (as opposed to actuality, which is the fulfillment of that capacity).

Recent Paintings, 2023–2025

The exhibition begins with Hawkins’s most recent work – a series of paintings that render Hollywood actors in dense, colourful compositions. Hawkins refers to the late work of Pierre Bonnard (b. 1867, Fontenay-aux-Roses; d. 1947 Le Cannet, France), invoking the painter’s application of colour and shifts between portraiture, landscape and still-life compositions of fruit. The works bring Hawkins’s enthusiasm for his subject matter and the history of painting onto the same plane, in a close study of Bonnard’s technique which he uses to frame a series of male subjects within fecund landscapes. Hawkins explains:

I was intrigued by the looseness and clumsiness that Bonnard makes look so easy and, having tried and failed to find any answer in reading about his methods, I had to make some Bonnards myself... getting lost in a fantasy of Bonnardness is my own kind of generative proliferation machine.*

The subjects appear cut and pasted from film or with occasional details of period costume allowing disembodied heads to be anchored by an ostentatious collar or cravat or gratuitous display of flesh. For example, *3 Jacks for Autumn* (2025) features the actor Jack O’Connell depicted in various roles against a landscape that makes reference to Bonnard’s 1936 painting *The Garden*. *Dandy Floriculturists* (2025) quotes passages from the 1945 painting *View from Artist’s Studio* to situate portraits of model Denek Kania with actors Nicholas Galitzine and Leo Suter in costume for the TV series *Sanditon* and Josh O’Connor in costume for a 2018 TV adaptation of *Les Misérables*. Artificial intelligence software was used to generate a Timothée Chalamet for *“That one night all those cute guys showed up...”* (2025) where he appears with Adam Driver (as a Jesuit priest from the 2016 film *Silence*) and Aaron Taylor Johnson (as a cavalry officer in a 2012 film of *Anna Karenina*) on Bonnard’s *Terrace at Vernon*

(1920/1939). Hawkins recasts his subjects in his own fictions, adopting Driver’s challenging look in this painting or the side-eye of Robert Helpmann (as the Child Catcher in the 1968 film *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*) for *All Hands on Deck* (2025) as a male predatory gaze. Bonnard, and by extension what Hawkins refers to as ‘Frenchness’, becomes a queer lens or narrative device:

...one of the highest forms of affectation, which is itself the first and preeminent principle of capital-F Faggotry. Affectation often originates from the quest... of any bright young lavender-shaded blossom to self-differentiate and ultimately de-assimilate from its original culture – in my unexceptional case, working-class Texas.*

After Artaud, 2012–2023

This wall brings together works from three exhibitions that were based upon detailed research that Hawkins made on the writer Antonin Artaud (b. 1896, Marseille; d. 1948, Ivry-sur-Seine). During the 1930s Artaud attempted to replace ‘bourgeois’, classical theatre with a ‘theatre of cruelty’, a primitive ceremonial experience intended to liberate the human subconscious and reveal man to himself. Hawkins focuses on Artaud’s travels in Mexico in 1936 and subsequent treatment in various psychiatric hospitals. Glazed ceramic reliefs produced between 2012 and 2016 and the 2023 video *Being and its Fetuses* are presented on a wallpaper for which Hawkins collaged images of other works on paper from a related series. Hawkins refers to Artaud’s own drawings and writing that filled over 20,000 pages of notebooks documenting a period during which he underwent electroshock therapy:

In trying to discern meaning, or at least, wanting to re-set the terms in which the drawings have traditionally been talked about, I finally settled on pulling individual elements

within a drawing out, looking for corresponding elements within the other drawings from this period and attempting to apply what can be known of the context in which they were made to, perhaps, contribute to their meaning.

— Richard Hawkins, 2016

A series of Artaud's motifs can be seen to refer in turn to his experiments with opiates and the psychoactive cacti peyote in Mexico. Spiky circular suns or 'buttholes' float alongside mummified figures – a reference to Artaud's description of long hours spent seated and immobile, '*cual momia*' [like a mummy]:

By cracking off elements from the rest of the drawings and focusing on this very small seemingly minor one, a new connection within Artaud's iconography occurs from all the way back to his writings on the Black Plague through the gris-gris spells and all the way up to his use of coffins in drawings from January through March 1946.

— Richard Hawkins, 2016

In *Being and its Fetuses* these motifs spin and pulsate to an electronic soundtrack that includes excerpts of Giorgio Moroder's music from the film *American Gigolo* (1980). Hawkins's collage also employs footage of religious festivals and practices from Sergei Eisenstein's 1932 film *Que Viva México!*, made shortly before Artaud's trip. Through a highly stylised documentary, Eisenstein could pose existential questions about religion, sexuality and communal experience that were not easily answered by Soviet solutions, a connection that Hawkins found in Artaud's writings in *Les Tarahumaras* (1945).

Sperm Traps, 2020

The sculptures *6 Sperm Traps (after Artaud's "The Sexual Inadequacy of God")* from 2020 is installed in a vitrine at the end of the wall. These small, pocket-sized objects incorporating portraits of Artaud are fashioned from matchbooks, matchboxes and cigarette packets that are pierced by pins, screwdrivers, skewers and other sharp objects. Hawkins playfully cites Artaud's belief that 'his sperm was being stolen during the night' and 'incubated into demon-spirits by a malevolent god or horde of succubi'. More specifically, they allude to a detail from his drawing *The Sexual Awkwardness of God* (1946) in which 'a blue boxlike form' appears 'to be armed with spikes and hooks on which one of Artaud's recurring sperm/fetus/proto-succubi have been ensnared.' (Richard Hawkins, 2019)

The Forrest Bess Variations, 2022–2023

Hawkins was in his early twenties when he discovered the work of Forrest Bess (b. 1911, Bay City Texas; d. 1977, Bay City Texas) in a 1982 issue of *Texas Monthly*. A painter who, like Hawkins, was born and raised in Texas, Bess worked as a commercial fisherman and painted in his spare time. His imagery was drawn from visions and dreams and influenced by alchemy, the writings of psychologist Carl Jung and the ritualistic practices of Aboriginal Australians, in particular ideas associated with the notion of hermaphroditism as a key to immortality. The article, which was published shortly after Bess's death, openly discussed his homosexuality and surgical attempts to become a hermaphrodite. This body of work draws upon research conducted four decades later:

The Forrest Bess Variations originated from a process of cross-referencing Bess's own lexicon of symbols and color codes with the archives of his surviving correspondence, alongside key sources (the psychoanalytic theories of Carl Jung and Herbert Silberer) the artist used as modes

of inspiration and interpretation. To get beyond mere corroboration or dutiful copying, I have made use of the two methods for accessing unconscious content essential to Bess's practice: hypnagogia, or the state between sleep and wakefulness, and Jungian Active Imagination.

— Richard Hawkins, 2022

Hawkins's *Legend* collages images of Bess's paintings and together with *Vas Hermeticus I* and *II* (all 2022) expands upon the artist's colour palette connecting themes of gender, sexuality, the cosmos and spirituality to bodily fluids such as 'urine' and 'sperm'. The titles and text incorporated in the compositions (such as 'bulbous urethra' or 'wounds' in *An Ascendant Legend* (2023) also provide a re-evaluated key for reading certain motifs in Bess's work.

Ankoku Butoh & Tatsumi Hijikata, 2012–2025

This wall comprises different chapters of Hawkins's research on the work of the choreographer Tatsumi Hijikata (b. 1928, Akita, Japan; d. 1986, Tokyo), who is credited as being the founder of the dance form *Butoh*. Emerging in the 1950s, *butō* (or *ankoku butō*, meaning 'dance of darkness') is characterised by slow, contorted moves and focuses on themes such as death, decay and the human condition. Hawkins recalls seeing Butoh on television in the 1980s and later visited the Hijikata archives in Tokyo where he consulted the Butoh-fu scrapbooks. Compiled by Hijikata from the 1960s, they combine newspaper clippings, photographs, images of artworks and dance notations within a semi-methodical approach to choreographing movement. Hawkins's series of *Ankoku* collages from 2012 employ asymmetric grids in which textual fragments, appropriated images and scraps of kraft paper are arranged in rhythmic intervals of an incantatory character. The works invite the viewer into a shared game of refined voyeurism, challenging us to identify iconic artworks by artists including Gustav Klimt (b. 1862, Vienna; d. 1918, Vienna), Egon Schiele (b. 1890, Tulln; d. 1918, Vienna), Hans Bellmer (b. 1902, Katowice; d. 1975, Paris) and Francis Bacon (b. 1909, Dublin; d. 2002, Madrid) and partake in the perverse poetic logic that Hawkins attributes to the Japanese choreographer:

In much the same way that the first flowering of modernism derived its artistic potency from selectively appropriated and misinterpreted fragments of the non-western, Hawkins draws attention to the way in which Hijikata disfigures these western bodies – in a very literal sense – chopping them up and rearranging them like a mad surgeon operating on so many dolls.

— Alex Lau, exhibition text for *The Garden of Loved Ones*, Empty Gallery, Hong Kong, 2025)

Together with his study of Artaud's (and by extension Eisenstein's) fascination with Mexico on the opposite wall, Hawkins's interest in Hijikata's scrapbooks reflects 'a reach out to an international environment to find reflections of my own idea about intellectuals and decadence'.* The three minute video *Redon Spider Sequence* (2025) incorporates imagery from Hijikata's scrapbooks. Hawkins used artificial intelligence software to animate images of Butoh dancers and details from paintings such as the sadistic onlooker that features in Hieronymus Bosch's depiction of hell in the triptych *Garden of Earthly Delights* (c. 1490–1500). He describes his approach to using AI, which he characterises as an 'unruly, ignorant and inconsistently juvenile' tool 'unable to follow through with even the most exacting of prompts':*

I've taken the halting output and stubborn ignorance of the various apps as intrinsic qualities specific to their own programming... The viewer hopefully gets a sense of

images which appear hesitant and subject to many stops, rewinds, circle-backs and do-overs, images that are unsure of themselves and prone to transforming though unresolved in either their own original or their newly modified state. There are instances... primarily dictated by the 5 or 10 second limit of those apps, where the subjects portrayed receive either a shock of mortifying regret or one quick zap of a cattle prod.*

Acrylic Paintings, 2019–2024

A series of colourful acrylic paintings fill three walls at the centre of the exhibition. Subjects that might have been cut from magazines and pasted into the painting in earlier bodies of work are here painted into dense, energetic compositions. Portraits appear in different orientations, at different scales and are often loosely organised on a spiral axis. Images of Hollywood celebrities fill the painting, Hawkins combines candid paparazzi shots with portraits of actors in costume and images from film, television and magazines. These are overlaid with motifs familiar from earlier bodies of work including fragments of text, zombies, vampires, dungeon doors, flowers and psychedelic patterns. Paintings, such as *To Divide Him Vein by Vein* and *Soft yet Weirdly Ways* (both 2020) employ excerpts of poetry by Algernon Charles Swinburne (b. 1837, London; d. 1909, London) alongside portraits of Justin Bieber, Alain Delon, Nick Jonas and Matt Dillon. Hawkins explains:

These came about at a time when I was feeling it necessary to come down from my lifelong hyper-vigilant anxiety (shades of the character Jean des Esseintes from *À rebours* here, neurasthenia there, etc.) and thought painting into the mornings and then settling down to reading poetry after lunch felt the best way forward... Swinburne in particular because he reads as very 'thirsty'.**

The vernacular of the scrapbook, which can hold all manner of material in its obsessive logic, becomes the organising principle for paintings that mix genres, history, popular culture and the fine arts with a precise and compelling disorder.

Paintings on Haunted Wallpaper, 2023

A series of oil paintings from 2023 are placed on a wallpaper derived from watercolours referring to the interiors of Hawkins's haunted dollhouse sculpture (2007–2010). Here Hawkins employs it to host a series of actors, male models, pop stars, Youtubers and Instagram influencers. Their portraits appear alongside samplings of paintings by Bonnard, Odilon Redon (b. 1840, Bordeaux; d. 1916, Paris), Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (b. 1880 Aschaffenburg; d. Davos Frauenkirch, 1938) and Charles Burchfield (b. 1893 Ashtabula, Ohio; d. 1967 West Seneca, New York). *Sprinkler* (2023) features Redon flowers and butterflies with actor Jo Jo Macari and musician Nick Jonas, the latter stripped of his swimwear to appear fully nude in Hawkins's version of the paparazzi portrait. Hawkins refers to the role of the internet as the obsessing engine for celebrity gossip and nudes which either fuels or augments the incomes of pornstars such as Blake Mitchell (Lane Rogers), Hoyt Kogan (Denek Kania) and twins Gustavo and Túlio Rocha, who feature in *Nocturne* (2023):

I love that generation of early internet porn where users cropped celebrity heads onto nude bodies, but it was always so crude – you could really see the seams, and the object of fixation was a mash of two decapitated figures.

— Richard Hawkins, 2024

Nestled between this group of paintings and the *Salome* works on the opposite wall, the 2018 sculpture *Garden of Loved Ones* presents a series of rubber masks bound in twine and synthetic cobwebs. The sculpture combines materials that Hawkins has used in his practice since the 1990s when he produced his first tabletop sculptures and other wall-based assemblages by cutting rubber masks into ribbons (following his grandmother's method for peeling an apple).

Salome Paintings, 2011–2021

The biblical story of Salome was a source of inspiration for paintings by many artists including Caravaggio (b. 1571, Milan; d. 1610, Porto Ercole, Italy), Artemisia Gentileschi (b. 1593, Rome; d. 1654, Naples) and Titian (b. 1488, Pieve di Cadore, Italy; d. 1576, Venice) as well as for works for the stage by Oscar Wilde (b. 1854, Dublin; d. 1900, Paris) and Richard Strauss (b. 1864, Munich; d. 1949, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany), whose opera was initially banned in Vienna. Hawkins retells it as a nightmarish fable of 'homo-dystopia' set inside a 'funhouse-cum-bordello' where severed heads haunt male prostitutes touting for business. 'My "Salome Paintings" could also be called "King of Hearts Paintings"', Hawkins wrote in 2011 referring to a gay club that operated in Silverlake, Los Angeles in the 1980s and 1990s. A *Division 44 Newsletter* from the time suggested: 'for those even more curious, go to King of Hearts (1800 Hyperion) but *please* be careful. If you like tatoos, motorcycles and muscle boys who grew up, you'll like Silverlake.' Hawkins explains:

...the Salome paintings are a kind of fantasy along these lines, of a grimy netherworld featuring vain attempts at an upscale re-do and where loose boys saunter or loiter around listlessly. I'm not sure why the boys' old customers are decapitated zombies. I've recently tacked a reproduction of Guido Reni's *David, Vanquisher of Goliath*, 1603–1604 to my studio wall.

— Richard Hawkins, 2011

The Salome paintings are accompanied by other nightmarish images crowded with zombies, monsters and sexual predators. The film *The George and Goliath Sequence* (2024) employs digitally altered photographs of George Clements, alternating between collages of magazine photography and Hawkins's 'disembodied zombie' portrait of the model. *Disembodied Zombie George Black* (2000) is from an early series of prints (dating from 1997) in which Hawkins used software to digitally manipulate photographs of Clements (and others) transforming them into 'zombies' that recall the bleeding head of John the Baptist in Gustave Moreau's 1874–1876 watercolour, *The Apparition*.

Orphans 2017–2024

Hawkins's selection of paintings for this part of the exhibition was based upon the subject of 'unrequited love, detachment and the troubles of romanticising a desiring subject.' He summarises it as 'the dark side of objectifying an object'. Images of actors such as Matt Dillon, Tom Cruise and musicians such as Slash who appear repeatedly in Hawkins's work from the 1990s onwards are collaged with other obsessions, including Greco-Roman statuary, Japanese hair models and vampires. In essay for the exhibition publication critic Kristian Vistrup Madsen draws connections from this work to Aby Warburg's (b. 1866, Hamburg; d. 1929, Hamburg) art historical *Bilderatlas* (1927–1930) attributing to *Golden Calf* and *Purple Melody* (both 2018) a 'quasi-scientific character, in their ordered grids, some semblance of a rational impulse, a desire to parse... Here is a map of the intersecting relations between the great marble head of Apollo, the majestic manes of guitarists, the particular

masculine daintiness evident in some Japanese fashion photography and Arnold Böcklin's *Toteninsel*'. Yet he locates in these assemblages: 'a different melancholy... a sense of yearning, a great desire first and foremost to amass, to satisfy some itch by that very amassing. Even at the point where the grid of images falters mid-way, as in *Purple Melody*, we recall the god of silence and secrecy and see in the rough application of purple colour only more flesh.' The ordered architecture of these compositions finds its counterpart in the tangle of oil stick in the *Lure Paintings* on the adjacent wall. The 2024–2025 video *Lust for Evil Sequence (Vienna Version)* can be seen to synthesise some of the subjects from this group of paintings, pairing images of Dillon with the sound of glam rock and Cruise in various roles, repeating and stitching together the actor's semi-nude appearances with a climactic scene from the 1985 film *Legend*. The video ends with images of Alain Delon from the 1960 film *Lust for Evil* playing through a series of windows that are superimposed onto various interiors papered with magazine imagery and centrefolds, rooms that Hawkins has described as 'goon caves'.

Mike Kelley is Dead, 2019–2022

Hawkins was a student of Mike Kelley (b. 1954, Wayne Michigan; d. 2012 South Pasadena, California) at California Institute of the Arts in the 1980's. *Death to Mike Kelley (in an attemptedly Peter Saul manner)* (2019) pays tribute to his former tutor via the work of Peter Saul (b. 1934, San Francisco) and Hans Hofmann (b. 1880, Weißenburg; d. 1966, New York City). Hawkins recalls Kelly's fervent reaction to seeing a painting by Hofmann in the actor and collector Leonard Nimoy's living room, denouncing the 'bad painting... propped up by dubious theorising' of Abstract Expressionism (Hawkins, 2019). Hawkins superimposes Hofmann's flat colour motifs over a composition that recalls Saul's labyrinthine paintings, described by Kelley in a 2002 interview as 'amazing deconstructions of the pretentious transcendentalism, and the ahistorical nature, of Abstract Expressionism – as well as the "elevated" self-righteous position of "political" art.' Kelley's work appears as isolated motifs collaged within the painting and Hawkins channels Saul's acerbic humour to express conflicted feelings around the artist's suicide in 2012.

Video Compilations, 2023–2025

The exhibition is bookended by two video rooms presenting videos produced between 2023 and 2025 in 'Cheerful' and 'Scary' compilations; the former, explains Hawkins, is 'deemed the cheerful compilation only because they're the few that aren't scary'. Hawkins adopted time-based media after working with gifs, clips and stickers on his long-running Instagram account and producing a series of music video collaborations with the Los Angeles-based artist Aaron Curry.

The Cheerful compilation includes excerpts from the 1973 'vintage gay film' *Ghost of a Chance* which Hawkins 're-tracked with a Grace Jones classic and interspersed with archival footage of a clinician's interview with a man diagnosed with schizophrenia' for the video *Libertango Catatonique (PG-rated)* (2023). He describes it as 'a story of nightclubs where high strangeness unfolds but turns on the mental patient's refusal to be so readily diagnosed.' He continues:

That one night... (2025) was originally conceived as a back projection for the balconies in the exhibition space. The video is based on the digital collages used for the painting *That one night all those cute guys showed up...* (2025) and runs through rudimentary AI software to make the 'boys' wink, vy, mug and attempt seriousness in front of the viewer as harps and bird chirps evoke a heavenly atmosphere.**

The compilation for the 'scariest' of the two video rooms includes, among other things:

A Goliath-sized shirtless David rising from Arnold Böcklin's *Die Toteninsel I...* holding a skull to the tune of Jobriath's *What a Pretty* followed by Black Sabbath's *War Pigs* and the collages of a serial killer (looking strangely like my own) with excerpts of Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing in the Hammer Horror flick, *I Monster*. In *Disfigures*, a number of Butoh-esque performers, entirely AI-generated, are repeatedly crushed and brought back to life under the weight of massive chrysanthemums and falling crabs and coffins while John Grant's droning cover of Nick Drake's sombre *Day Is Done* plays.**

*Richard Hawkins interviewed by Bruce Hainley for the exhibition catalogue *Potentialities*;

** Notes from the artist for this text, 2025

Biography

Richard Hawkins (b. 1961, Mexia, Texas) has held solo exhibitions at Tate Liverpool (2014); Le Consortium, Dijon (2013); The Art Institute of Chicago; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (both 2010); De Appel Arts Centre, Amsterdam (2007) and Kunstverein Heilbronn (2003). His work has also been presented at Artists Space, New York (2023); Bonner Kunstverein (2019); Kunstinstituut Melly, Rotterdam (2014) and the 2012 Whitney Biennial, New York. Hawkins's work is held in numerous public collections including the Art Institute of Chicago; Museum of Contemporary Art and the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; The Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Tate, London and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. In 2024, his work was the inspiration for the designer J.W. Anderson's Fall/Winter menswear collection for Loewe. Hawkins lives and works in Los Angeles where he is a Professor of Painting & Drawing at the ArtCenter College of Design, Pasadena.

Exhibition Publication

The exhibition is accompanied by a new publication, the first on Richard Hawkins in over 15 years. It features essays by Rhea Anastas, Annie Ochmanek and Kristian Vistrup Madsen, as well as an interview with the artist by Bruce Hainley.

Limited Edition

Richard Hawkins has created a limited edition print as part of a new series of artists' editions produced in support of Kunsthalle Wien's programme. *Purple Melody Vienna* (2025) reproduces the 2018 painting *Purple Melody* included in the exhibition.

Richard Hawkins

Purple Melody Vienna, 2025

Edition of 50 + 5 AP

53,3 x 40 cm

Giclée print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag® Ultra Smooth

Numbered and signed

€ 300 / € 580 framed

Kunsthalle Wien's editions are available from the shops at Kunsthalle Wien Museumsquartier and Karlsplatz as well as online. Sales proceeds support Kunsthalle Wien's programme.

Public Programme

- | | | | |
|-------------------|-------------|-------|--|
| 18.11. | 18:00 | | Artist Talk: Richard Hawkins in conversation with Christian Lclair, art historian and critic, in cooperation with the University of Applied Arts Vienna (EN) |
| 11.12. | 17:30 | | Guided Tour (DE) |
| 15.1. | 17:30 | | Guided Tour (EN) |
| 22.1. | 18:00 | | Curator's Tour with Sarah Crowe (DE) |
| 27.1., 24.3. | | | |
| ↳ | 11:00 | | Guided Tour for Adults & Babies (DE) |
| 6.2. | 18:00 | | Video Screening and Talk @ Hard On Vienna (DE) (18+) |
| 19.2, 5.3., 12.3. | | | |
| ↳ | 18:00 | | Guided Tour in cooperation with Kunsthistorisches Museum (DE) |
| 26.2. | 17:30 | | Guided Tour in cooperation with Qwien – Zentrum für queere Kultur und Geschichte (DE) |
| 19.3. | 18:30–20:00 | ... | Two-part Workshop in cooperation with Qwien – Zentrum für queere Kultur und Geschichte (DE/EN) |
| 21.3. | 11:00–16:00 | | |

Guided tours are offered in English, German, Einfache Sprache [Plain German] and Austrian Sign Language.

Full programme details for the exhibition are available online:



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