

Egle Jauncems

Orion

Cedric

Bardawil

1-3 Old Compton Street

London

W1D

5JB



...as soon as a work of art is of practical use, betrays a purpose or a tendency, its beauty vanishes.
August Strindberg, *The Red Room* (1879)

Women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size.

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929)

With enough mirrors within and even without the room, a cantilever supporting them, mountains and oceans might be manifest.
Denise Levertov, *The Room* (1958)

The Room: Egle Jauncems' Diurnal Quilts

This essay is dedicated to Milla

Essay by Matthew Holman

Egle Jauncems makes rooms out of art, and art out of rooms. By recuperating the debris not of the street but the alienated contours of our everyday lives – the surgical mask left in our pocket, the cardboard packaging in the baseball caps we buy, and the kitsch decorations we play with to delight our children – her work reimagines the function of waste and beauty in a postlapsarian consumer age. Predominantly using oils on linen, but also rabbit skin glue, staples, beeswax, and pigments that she mixes herself, and bearing the influence of the weaving techniques that she developed as a postgraduate student at Chelsea School of Art and Design, Jauncems has created a richly textured world. When one says this of artists, we often imply that they have created a vast new world, and this world is more expansive than the world of forms that we spend our waking lives with. With Jauncems, however, this world is resolutely smaller and more claustrophobic. Her textured landscapes of interiors and interior life is the world we know only too well, that we probably pass by every day and refuse to acknowledge. This is true not merely insofar as we miss those meanings that lie hidden from us, latently to be found, but how the world of things with which we increasingly populate our lives also *shapes* our lives. In an age of throwaway and single-use goods, we have become accustomed to those things made very far away that we bring into our homes every day and live with. Jauncems walks through the world and puts her finger on each thing and asks: 'how did this get here?' In doing so, she asks the same question of us. Born in Vilnius, Lithuania, Jauncems studied Sinology at the city's university, a discipline that is at once cultural and anthropological, and led her to live in Taiwan before studying the arts in London.



↑ PAULINAS KALUINA AT HIS HOME IN SKAPIŠKIS, 2007

Let's look at two examples: suitably, a companion piece. In *Walls on Doors / Free Pattern* (2023) and *Walls on Floors* (2023), Jauncems creates dynamic rectangular forms of cross-hatched patterns that zig-zag and overlap, and gesture to the unfinished quilted designs of the celebrated Lithuanian cobbler

Paulinas Kaluina. Partly resembling insects or clumsy bugs that scuttle around the ceilings and skirting boards of our rooms, the patterns are excitingly complex and multifaceted, and are made from cut-outs of a felt ice cream toy set belonging to her daughter. Both works emerged out of Jauncems' desire to glue her daughter's bedroom with wallpaper made entirely like this – a room made of ice cream! – but she acknowledges the process will probably never be realised. 'I find that imagining and planning and living with the idea', she writes, 'gives me more excitement than the probable result.' All makers know that to imagine living, breathing, and sleeping in a world of art can be more intoxicating than the actuality.



↑ MARCEL DUCHAMP, BOTTLE RACK, 1914. GALVANIZED IRON, DIMENSIONS VARIABLE

It is a truism to say that waste has been transformed into art many times before. Jauncems' otherworldly quilts speak back in a long art historical discussion that stretches back at least as far as Marcel Duchamp's conceptual approach to the 'Ready-made.' Then in the sixties, the expansion of the society of consumption inspired the 'Junk Art' movement and the famous Franco-American artist Arman. In his series entitled *Accumulations*, he aggregated rubbish and discarded consumer products in airtight glass boxes. By including discarded items in his work, the artist highlights a society in which everything is disposable after a single use. Jauncems approaches her work in a similar way, but in her work the boundary lines between art and waste are blurred even further. In *Size X* (2023), Jauncems has made a series of patterns from her husband's baseball cap packaging, more of her daughter's toys, and some parts 'recycled' from her old paintings. Look at how the baseball cap packaging opens like lungs, like vessels for life, or perhaps crustaceans, like T. S. Eliot's 'pair of ragged claws / [s]cuttling across the floors of silent seas.' In this way, and like many of her works, there appears to be subtle visual references to Christian iconography, from the central

cross formation to the reaching hands, fixed in place like Christ's on the crucifix. These, too, we might say are 'ready-made' ideas: they come from someplace else, freighted with their own loaded meanings; there to be taken and transformed. The way things might look are so often not what they are; we can find beauty in the disposable and the impermanent, the waste of capital, as we can find vulgarity in the earnestness of the Old Masters. We can subtly resist the economic models that produce and pollute, slowly degrading the environment and choking our lungs, Jauncems suggests, by resisting the requisite for single-use functionality and refashioning and re-creating those forms with time, patience, and practice. This does not simply equate to an aestheticization of single-use consumerism. Instead, Jauncems' practice is a radical vision that acknowledges the artist today as living in an economy that has been built on over-production and waste. There is no way out, only ways in.

When I visited Jauncems' studio in a converted ground-floor shop north of the Euston Road, I was captivated by her range of books that scattered the workshop tabletops and makeshift shelving units. Nicole Garnier-Pelle's *Symbols of Power in Art*, with a plump Emperor Napoleon in his regalia on the cover, as well as Patricia Lee Rubin's *Images and Identity in Fifteenth-Century Florence*. While Jauncems' collages might imply a very different world to the one of Botticelli and the Medicis – hers is the world of things during late capitalism, with all its detritus and waste, not the new dawn of merchant capital and arts patronage – she delights in telling me that both worlds, Florence in 1485 and London in 2024, are obsessed by celebrity. They are cities of spectacle. As Jauncems assembled parts of a new work in progress for me to look at – faces, oblongs, tassels, crosses – I felt that they stood as kinds of vowels and consonants, like her very own alphabet of forms. But more than that, each was tied to her experience of something, not like a letter can make up thousands of words but that each symbol in her work related back – purposefully, sensitively – to a kind of interior experience, as though this enabled her to communicate something she could not say. 'The Structuralists were interested in language, grammar, and words', the artist Louise Bourgeois once said: 'Sartre and the Existentialists were interested in experience. Obviously, I am on the side of the Existentialists. With words, you can say anything. You can lie as long as the day, but you cannot lie in the re-creation of an experience.' If Jauncems' vocabulary of forms has something only it can say, it does not lie but seeks to articulate something about the unrepeatability of experience.

As the basis of tailoring and dressmaking, the pattern functions as a kind of source for Jauncems to return to time and again, but a source that

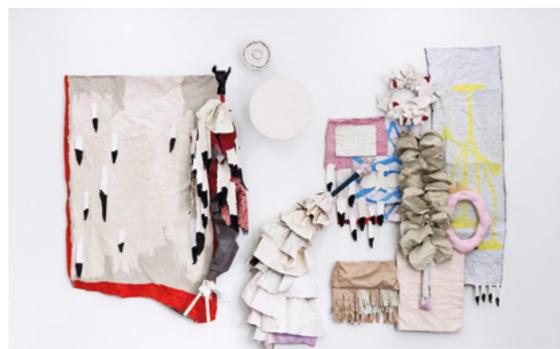
initially ties her work to the economic models of textile production while resolutely disrupting that logic by rupturing consistency and use-value. In *Sunset / Sunrise / PB 25-27* (2023), Jauncems has taken the code and size of a Petit Bateau sock that she bought for her daughter, and transformed the outline of packaging into a compelling pattern that resembles a landscape (or, perhaps, a child's rendering of a landscape). Stretching out like a daffodil in springtime, the yellow shape appears ambivalently redemptive in a desolate field. Its shape is that shape only because it is the residue of mass-produced consumer function and yet, stripped of a sole purpose, its status as waste is transformed into something altogether more generative and more capacious.



↑ LOUISE BOURGEOIS, UNTITLED, 2002

The diurnal rhythms of day and night, as well as the transitional light that carries us from one interval of time into another, also occupies *Orion* (2023), the title of the present exhibition at Cedric Bardawil, and named after the Greek mythological figure, a giant and a hunter, who was changed into a constellation at his death. (And not just any constellation, we should remember, but one lying on the celestial equator, and containing many bright stars, including Rigel, Betelgeuse, and a line of three that form Orion's Belt). After Jauncems' husband affixed fake neon stars above their daughter's tiny bed, and when the artist knelt beneath this artificial night sky to read bed-time stories to her daughter, Jauncems felt like a hero, a warrior – like Orion.

As in so many of Jauncems' works, the forms might suggest the world we know, or know of from books – *we might ask if those crossed-hatched pockets of blue represent the sky, or perhaps the stars?* – but they offer up only possible exit strategies in a complex web of meaning that refuses to lead back to her novel practice of cutting, stapling, and stitching forms. In other words, don't look for what the work seems to resemble, but what the work is made from; not what it says, but what it is. In this case, the tassels that droop down below the blue crosses are stripped from an earlier work, *Study of Napoleon*



↑ EGLE JAUNCEMS, STUDY OF NAPOLEON AS A YOUNG MAN, 2017. OIL ON CANVAS, DIMENSIONS VARIABLE.

as a *Young Man* (2017), submitted to her MA Degree Show at the Royal College of Art, where she studied under a David Hockney Art Foundation Scholarship. But the disembodied and rearticulated Napoleon here is a bathetic rather than heroic figure, someone to pity as much as to monumentalise (à la Woolf's sentiments in my epigraph). But the fact that this work is a 'study' of a historical figure we all know, and can all envisage a sense of his shortness or his portliness or his insecurity, and resolutely offers no physically humanoid resemblance, forces us to ask different questions. Ralph Waldo Emerson, another lover of the constellations, poses one possible question well: 'In my utter impotence to test the authenticity of the report of my senses, to know whether the impressions they make on me correspond with outlying objects, what difference does it make, whether Orion is up there in heaven, or some god paints the image in the firmament of the soul?'



OLE-LUK-OIE, THE DREAM GOD BY HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN, 1886.

Jauncems' *Orion* seems to be neither up in heaven nor etched onto our souls, but is there principally to test the authenticity of our senses. By titling another work *Ole-Luk-Oie* (2023), Jauncems situates her enigmatic linen stitches more firmly in the world of the childhood imagination. Inspired by the European folklore figure of the Sandman, Hans Christian

Anderson created Ole-Luk-Oie (or Ole Lukøje, 'close eye', in Danish) as a dream god. Ole-Luk-Oie carries an umbrella under each arm; one of them, with pictures on the inside, he spreads over the good and well-behaved children, and then they dream the most extraordinary stories the whole night. But the other umbrella has no pictures; it is deadened and dull, and this he holds over the naughty children so that they sleep heavily, and wake in the morning without having dreamed at all. In Jauncems' retelling of this myth, she has traced the shape of a large, irregular-edged surgical mask and cut it out on linen, before making eyes, a mouth and a thinned nose, with seven circles of white and a single yellow then stapled on. It is as though the ominous browns, blacks, and greys of Jauncems' trademark finger-like patterns that foreground this fantastical face is the night-sky, and the visage the very countenance of Ole-Luk-Oie himself, lullabying us like children in the dark. In many ways, though, it is not the visual representation of the story that Jaucemes co-opts – the looming figure of Ole-Luk-Oie, with his umbrellas and magic – rather the haunting self-image that we all have, in those nocturnal moments before rest, when we are both ourselves and someone else as we fall, sometimes hard and sometimes soft, into dream.



↑ EGLE JAUNCEMS AT CEDRIC BARDAWIL, JANUARY 2024

Orion





Walls on Floors, 2023
Oil on linen
66 × 56cm



Detail



Orion, 2023
Oil on linen
67.5 × 37cm



Detail



Size X, 2023
Oil and egg emulsion on linen
145 × 170cm



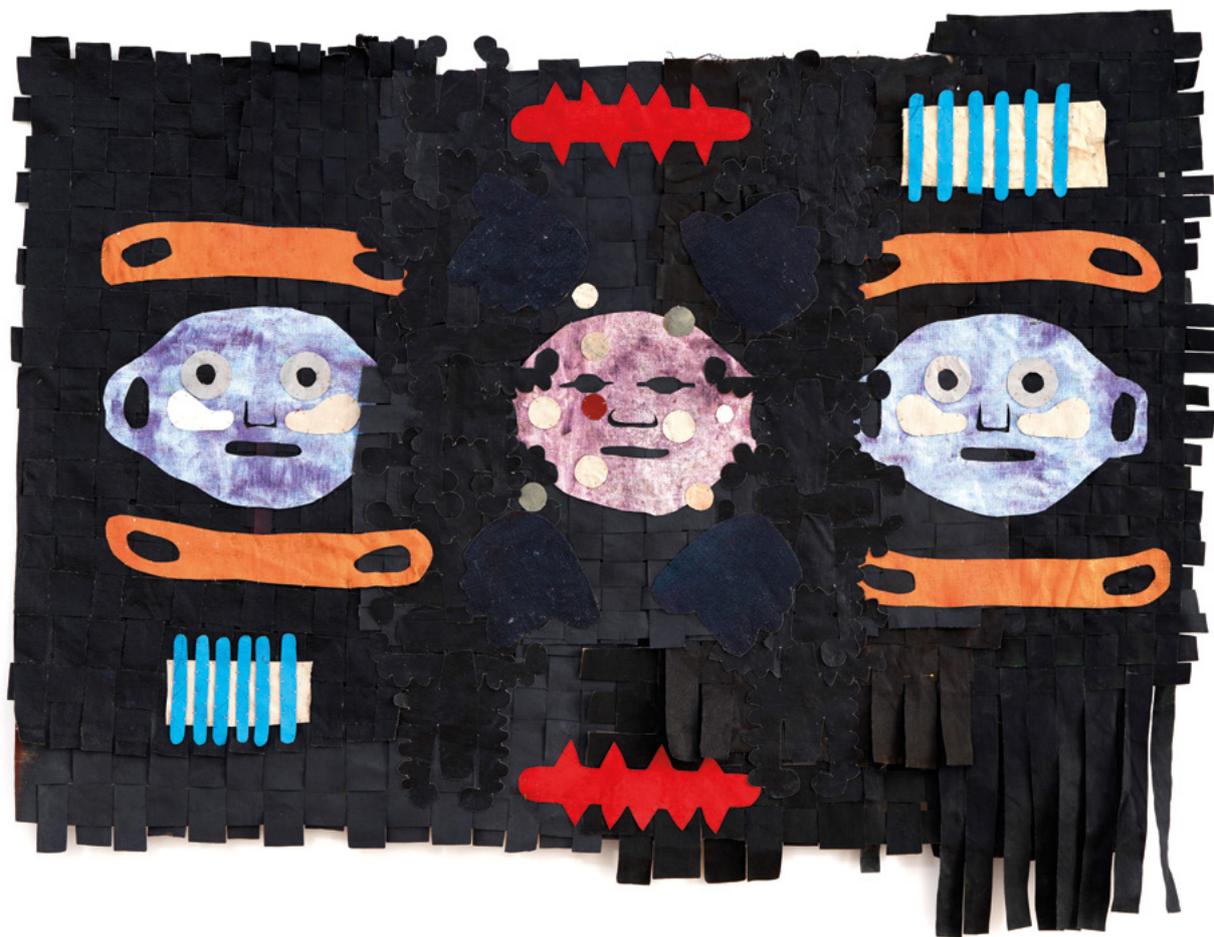
Detail



Sunset / Sunrise / PB 25-27, 2023
Oil and paper on linen
46 × 37cm



Detail



Extra Riche Reparatrice, 2023
Oil on linen
100 × 130cm



Detail



Walls on Doors / Free Pattern, 2023

Oil on linen

88 × 63cm



Detail



Stilo, 2023
Oil on linen, egg emulsion on muslin
55 × 48cm



Detail



Ole-Luk-Oie, 2023
Oil on linen
50 × 49cm



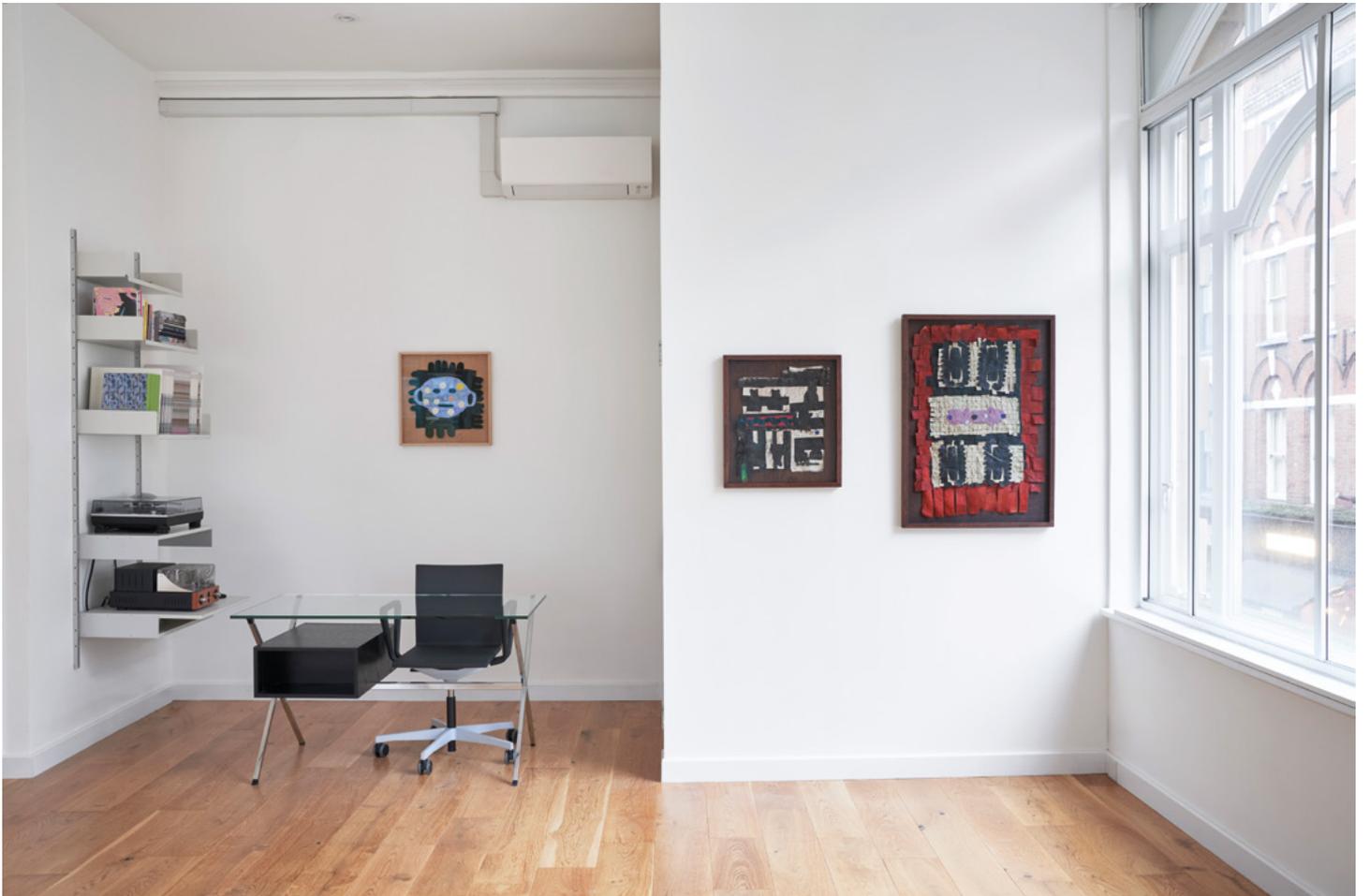
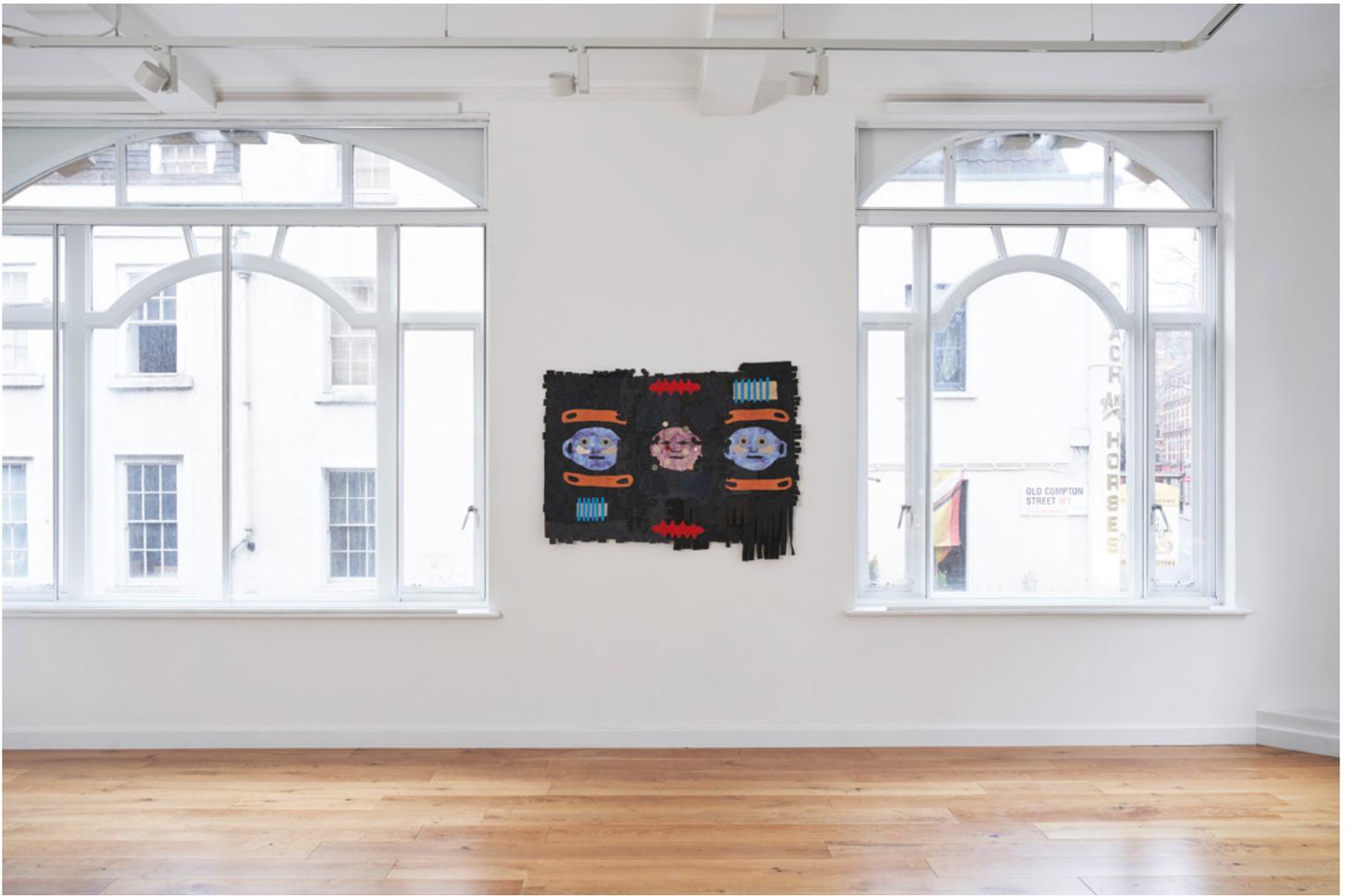
Detail



Installation Views



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