

Western Front Society Annual Report 20/21



Jawa El Khash
The Upper Side of the Sky (2019)
virtual reality still
Courtesy the artist

Message from the President

On behalf of all at Western Front, I acknowledge that we are operating on the unceded, ancestral, and occupied, traditional lands of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations of the Coast Salish peoples.

As we enter the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, we recognize that we are living through unprecedented times, both at Western Front and globally. Despite a continuing need to restrict person-to-person contact, Western Front has remained a site of vibrant inquiry, exploration, development, and exchange. As the President of the Board, I feel great pride in this organization, which faced a year of extraordinary challenges, yet has moved from strength to strength.

I feel gratitude for the artists who have utilized Western Front as a platform for the development and delivery of their work. And I am equally grateful to all of the staff who have demonstrated incredible creativity, commitment, and team-work in the past year. I am thankful to audiences who brought their curiosity and support to our events. And I am personally indebted to every member on the Board of Directors, who have embraced a year of evaluation and training around the Board's composition, structure, roles, and responsibilities within the organization.

We have learned a lot this year: about technology, about togetherness, and about ourselves. Performances, exhibitions, and events that were moved to an online format reached larger audiences than would have been possible in situ, with digital programs cumulatively attracting over 12,000 unique engagements. Projects that did take place in person may have had limited numbers but became uniquely intimate experiences. This was also a time during which great work was done in the archives, with the digitization project allowing us to reconnect with people from our shared history.

We spent time reflecting on the state of our organization in 2020: from continuing a feasibility study of our physical building, that includes improving accessibility; to reviewing policies and procedures around recruitment, bullying and harassment,

and governance; and to crucial work reflecting on justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in our organization through a consultant-led assessment process. We are grateful for the time and space this unique year afforded us to take on this important work. We are thankful for the many people who stepped up to offer us support and guidance along the way. We have learned a great deal about ourselves, past and present. We now know so much more about what we need to do in order to ensure that Western Front is a well governed organization, and we will continue to learn and strengthen into the future.

As we look to the next year, we are in a great position to build upon the work from this year so that all of us at Western Front can continue to realize our mandate. We have an excellent Executive Director in Susan Gibb, and a very smart and capable team around her. We, the Board, are currently in the process of reviewing and updating our governance documents, including the terms of references for our roles and committees, to better support our ongoing work and the recruitment and onboarding of future Board members. In November we will announce an open call for new Board members to add specific types of expertise to the Board, including financial experience and practicing artists. We look forward to a year in which we build on our already great team and expand our capabilities as an organization.

Thank you all for your support of Western Front. We wish you continued safety and good health, and we hope there will be more in-person gatherings in our future.

Mari Fujita
President

Message from the Executive Director

The year was shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, Western Front was required to temporarily close until late June, and then to continue to adapt with changing public health orders. In particular, restrictions on travel and gathering significantly impacted upon our live music and performance programming, fundraising events, venue hire, and co-productions. We were also required to update our IT systems to support work-from-home arrangements, as well as to make improvements onsite to ensure health and safety. Despite these challenges and emerging needs, the pandemic has served as an important reminder of the values of community and connection. I am thankful that Western Front's team remained in good health throughout the year, and for the dedication they have shown to working together to creatively and strategically respond to the conditions at hand. Together we have embarked on a timely process of reevaluating how we engage artists and communities, facilitate access to our programs, and work together as an organization. This has created fertile ground for shared learning and growth, and has resulted in numerous positive achievements, which is also generating much enthusiasm for the year ahead.

Central to our COVID-19 response has been an unwavering commitment to supporting artists, with us successfully finding ways to reschedule or reshape all projects to ensure a continuity of support. This has included a renewed focus on our artists-in-residence program. Throughout the year, local artists were invited to use the Grand Luxe Hall as a studio, and were provided with increased artist fees, production budgets, and technical support to create new work. We also increasingly employed digital platforms as a means to present projects and enhance accessibility to events occurring onsite. One such digital initiative was the establishment of a Bandcamp presence, Western Front Recordings, which has proved to be a successful new revenue stream and avenue for audience outreach. Underpinning our adaptability was ongoing operational support from all our government funders, including additional funding from the BC Arts Council through its Arts and Culture Resilience Supplement, and the Government of Canada through the Canada

Emergency Wage Subsidy. This government support, alongside reduced expenditure due to COVID-19 restrictions on travel and gathering, has seen Western Front finish the year with a surplus, ensuring a strong financial position to weather the uncertainty of the year ahead. We were also awarded the Audain Prize for the Visual Arts alongside ten other artist-run centres in British Columbia, which provided a significant boost to morale and our financial position.

Western Front was also able to support local independent music venues who don't receive government funding, and local musicians in need of rehearsal space during the pandemic through a special project funded by a private patron. With Coastal Jazz, Music on Main, and NOW Society, Western Front administered funding to support The Black Lab, China Cloud, Deep Blue, and The Post at 750 to upgrade the safety of their venue and develop COVID-19 protocols, and offer 150 hours of free rehearsal music space at each venue to Vancouver-based musicians.

COVID-19 also provided further momentum to the process of organizational renewal that Western Front is moving through as it approaches its 50th anniversary. This renewal process has been set in motion by a number of unique events, which have been driving change in the organization over the past five years. These events include: the Western Front Society purchasing its building in 2016, and the need to adjust operations to meet the realities of building ownership; the restructuring of the Canada Council for the Arts funding model in 2017, which saw discreet disciplinary funding pools collapsed into a single operating fund; and the Executive Director leadership transition in late 2019. Each event has presented unique challenges and opportunities, which have required Western Front to transform its operations and programs in response. Furthermore, social and cultural movements calling for truth and reconciliation and racial justice are also inspiring us to critically reflect on our mandate and organizational culture, while the reality of the climate crisis is requiring us to rethink our production models. Advancements in the digital world are also driving change in how we produce and present our programs, and work together on a day-to-day basis.

As part of this renewal process, in 2020/21 Western Front engaged consultant Natasha Aruliah to facilitate a Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) process within the organization, to help us identify some current and underlying issues, and to provide recommendations towards better embedding JEDI values and practices across all that we do. These recommendations included a need to shift the workplace culture from one that is informal, unstructured, and 'familial', as such can thwart JEDI efforts; and for there to be more investment in changing systems and supporting all staff to better embed JEDI principles

organization-wide. Following Aruliah's recommendations, we subsequently engaged the consultant Amorell Saunders N'Daw, who is in the process of assisting us to evaluate and revise our governance and organizational structure, and advising on recruitment. This work is laying the foundation to recruit new team members to our board and staff in late 2021, and then to commence strategic planning in early 2022. As part of this renewal process, we have also increased professional development opportunities for all board and staff. Across the year, board and staff were supported to participate in industry conferences, webinars, training courses, and individual coaching to ensure capacity growth within their roles and the organization.

With the Building Committee of the Board, work on a master-plan and accompanying feasibility study also continued. This work is being undertaken to resolve long-term subsidence issues with the building's foundation and the accessibility challenges of our second floor, alongside necessary infrastructural upgrades to better support our programs. To commence this process, through the support of the Vancouver Heritage Foundation, Birmingham & Wood was engaged to produce a Statement of Significance and Heritage Conservation Plan. We have subsequently engaged Birmingham & Wood to lead a second phase, which will include bringing on a code consultant; structural, envelope, and electrical engineers; and cost consultant, to estimate the associated costs and plan phases of the building's upgrade.

Alongside this planning work, we were also successful in securing funding to undertake routine maintenance. This included securing \$35K from the City of Vancouver towards the replacement of the flat roof and deck on the second and third floors of the building, and over \$250K through the Unique Heritage Stream of the Community Economic Recovery Infrastructure Program (CERIP) of the Province of British Columbia, to restore all of Western Front's windows to working order and repaint its exterior in celebration of the building's 100th anniversary in 2022. We were also able to upgrade the two hot water systems in the building to a single tankless unit, increasing energy efficiency. Through the City of Vancouver's COVID-19 Cultural Impact Critical Assistance program, we received support to consolidate our staff offices to increase the amount of creative space available to artists on our second floor. The former staff office on that floor is being converted into a flexible work space that can be used by artists as a studio; staff and board as a meeting room; a library to rehome our rare book collection, increasing its accessibility and preservation; and as an auxiliary space to better support events in the Luxe, through increasing passages for audience circulation and air ventilation.

Across the year, we progressed a number of multi-year strategic initiatives in our archives. This includes continuing a grant from the Digital Strategy Fund of the Canada Council for the Arts, in partnership with the Morris & Helen Belkin Art Gallery and the Residential History School & Dialogue Centre at the University of British Columbia, which has supported us to build a custom open source CollectiveAccess archive database. As part of this project, through the support of the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre's BC History Digitization Program, we were also able to digitize our collection of performance objects, including many items in the newly acquired Hank Bull fonds. In September, we were also pleased to welcome archivist Abigail Sebaly to complete a three-year project funded by the Documentary Heritage Community Program (DHCP) of Library and Archives Canada. This project is supporting us to digitize our analog videotape collection by our 50th anniversary. With the grant, we were also able to acquire a Sony AV-3650 deck, and host virtual maintenance and repair workshops with AV specialist Dave Pinney of Precision Video Services for the local AV community, including archivists from University of Toronto, Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, FADO Performance Art Centre, City of Vancouver Archives, Indigitization/Museum of Anthropology, Musqueam, grunt gallery, Vancouver Holocaust Centre, Emily Carr University of Art + Design, and VIVO Media Arts.

I would like to thank Western Front's team and Board of Directors for their continued enthusiasm, unwavering resilience, and impressive adaptability throughout this year. In particular, I would like to acknowledge Amber Frid-Jimenez for her four years of dedicated service on the Board of Directors, including as Treasurer in 2020; Pablo de Ocampo for his six years of inspirational programming as Exhibitions Curator, and Simranpreet Anand for the insight and energy she brought during her two years as Exhibitions Assistant. The entire team is grateful to all the participating artists of the 2020/21 programs, and to the audience who visited us both online and in person. In addition, we would like to thank all partners, funders, foundations, members, supporters, colleagues, and friends who contributed to the development of our projects, and have assisted in our resilience in this challenging time.

Susan Gibb
Executive Director



Autumn Knight
Untitled (2021)
video still, duration 2:02:26 minutes
Courtesy the artist



Mepalu Sari student workshops in Bali (2020)
Courtesy Insitu Recordings



Mepalu Sari student workshops with Burnaby North Secondary School (2020)
Photo: Lief Hall

ARTISTIC PROGRAM

Online Colloquium

June 20, 2020

Improvising Forward: Persevere, Repair, Sustain

Anna Webber & Angela Morris and Gerald Cleaver

A colloquium live-stream on YouTube in which musicians Anna Webber & Angela Morris and Gerald Cleaver engaged with the following questions: how does music help us to persevere in the face of crisis? In what ways does improvisation offer sustained hope or sustaining vitality? Does music of the moment, in the present tense, address the possibility of reparation, or of repairing our challenging relationships with each other and with the world? How might the improvising arts encourage communities to move forward?

Presented with UBC's International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation and Coastal Jazz & Blues Society.

Exhibition

July 15 – August 22, 2020

Everything is in the language we use

Mercedes Eng, Emma Hedditch, Lis Rhodes

Everything is in the language we use borrowed its title from a poem by Oglala Lakota poet and activist Layli Long Soldier, and brought together artists who negotiate the distance between the seen and the unseen. Using word, image, and action, each of the artists make visible the legal, political, social, and economic systems that govern our lives in their work.

Additional programming:

- Online reading group on Mercedes Eng's *Prison Industrial Complex Explodes: A Poem* (2017), facilitated by Cecily Nicholson.
- A weekly podcast featuring selections from Lis Rhodes' book *Telling Invents Told* (2019) read aloud by artists and curators including Christina Battle, Almudena Escobar López, Annie MacDonell, Elizabeth Zvonar, and Crystal Z. Campbell.
- Online screening of Lis Rhodes' film *Journal of Disbelief* (2000-16) with an audio description by Jae Lew, Cori Coutu, Emma Hedditch and Tiffany Muñoz.

Youth Program, Online Project, and Record Launch

August 7-14, 2021

Mepalu Sari (Essence of a Collision)

Ashley Musa, Ben Berardini, Bianca Greco, Denis Petrov, Dewa Gede Agung Kayonanda Parikesit Pemayun, Ethan Lum, Ida Bagus Pradnyananta Arimbawa, I Gede Mei Sutrisna Yasa, I Kadek Anggara Dwianta, I Kadek Bagas Suryadinata, I Kadek Diva Nanditya, I Kadek Hendra Dwiantara, I Kadek Wahyu Baskara Dewangga, I Komang Galang Widnyana, I Made Panji Pradnya Adi Kusuma, I Putu Diva Adi Pradana, I Putu Restu Andika, Kalyan Rath, Made Pande Gangga Sentana, Maria Alvarez, Mela Melania & Jack J, Minimal Violence (Ash Luk and Lida P), Pande Komang Gede Triadi Ditya, Rohini Soedhwa, Sarah Davachi, Scott Gailey, and Tegan Wahlgren.

For *Mepalu Sari (Essence of a Collision)*, high school students in Bali were commissioned to compose, perform, and record new music for gamelan that would later be sampled and reinterpreted by Canadian high school students and local electronic musicians. Concurrently, students at Burnaby North Secondary School, led by teacher Kevin Ault, engaged with the sounds of

gamelan music, attending two workshops with Insitu Recordings' founders Jonathan Adams and I Putu Gede Sukaryana. Through these workshops the students learned about the history of Balinese gamelan and had the opportunity to play the instrument. After this, they began working with Vancouver-based composers Brian Topp, Yu Su, and Kiran Bhumber, learning the program Ableton Live and beginning the process of creating new works using the gamelan samples.

The works were originally planned to be premiered at Western Front in 8-channel surround sound in early June, but due to COVID-19, the concert had to be canceled. In April it was decided to extend the scope of the project. The Balinese compositions were provided to local and internationally-based Canadian artists. The original gamelan pieces by the Balinese students and the reinterpretations by Canadian students and artists were released together online as an album.

Produced in partnership with Burnaby North Secondary School and Insitu Recordings, and presented in partnership with New Forms Festival.

Exhibition

September 11 - October 24, 2020

Hazel Meyer

The Weight of Inheritance

A chance encounter at a house in Toronto's east end led to Hazel Meyer being gifted a ton of marble that once belonged to artist and filmmaker Joyce Wieland. Wieland's marble sits as a conceptual base for *The Weight of Inheritance*, an exhibition that included new and recent sculptures and drawings by Meyer that wrestle with questions of legacy and lineage, of memory and nostalgia, and of how to reconcile and situate oneself in the gaps and overlaps between feminisms.

Presented together, the works serve as a theatrical set for a performance entitled *The Marble in the Basement*. As the pandemic prevented a full presentation of Meyer's performance project, she used the exhibition as an occasion to develop and rehearse the performance. In lieu of an audience, the performances were witnessed by artists Alysha Seriani and S F Ho, who worked with Meyer to produce film and writing that sit alongside this body of work.

Online Talk and Record Launch

September 19, 2020

Elisa Harkins, Hanako Hoshimi-Caines, and Zoë Poluch

Radio III

To celebrate the official launch of the *Radio III* record, Elisa Harkins, Hanako Hoshimi-Caines, and Zoë Poluch hosted an online listening party and artist talk as part of the Time Based Art Festival in Portland. *Radio III* is an Indigenous futurist concert, a beautiful and uncomfortable dance performance, and a perverse triangle of shifting power that seeks to be unfaithful to both minimalism and postmodern dance's claims to so-called "neutrality." The project combines disco and Indigenous languages in an effort to alter the fate of these endangered languages through active use, preservation on pressed vinyl, and radio play. *Radio III* features songs by Elisa Harkins, some of which are in Cherokee and Muscogee (Creek).

Produced and presented by Western Front and Portland Institute of Contemporary Art.

Online Talk and Record Launch

September 23, 2020

Mikrokosmos (Steffani Jemison and Justin Hicks)

Another time, this time, one time LP

To celebrate the official launch of the *Another time, this time, one time record*, Steffani



Hazel Meyer
The Weight of Inertia (2020)
exhibition install
Courtesy the artist
Photo: Dennis Ha

Jemison and Justin Hicks, with curator Pablo de Ocampo, hosted an online talk and listening party on Montez Radio, New York.

Another time, this time, one time, the first Mikrokosmos LP, uses Gil Scott-Heron and Brian Jackson's *We Almost Lost Detroit* (1977) as the raw material for R&B song-writing. Like a game in which new words are formed from existing letters, these live compositions take the form of musical studies, samples, and improvisations. Inspired by Scott-Heron's own ambitious songbook, Jemison and Hicks reflect upon a wide range of subjects, including Scott-Heron's biography, police violence in the United States, and the nuclear catastrophe that threatened the city of Detroit in 1966.

Online Exhibition

October 12, 2020 - April 30, 2021

Jawa El Khash

The Upper Side of the Sky

Independent curator Dana Qaddah, facilitated an online exhibition of Jawa El Khash's research project *The Upper Side of The Sky*. As described by Qaddah, El Khash's project is "an interactive virtual reality archive of the ancient ruins of Palmyra, Syria, created by the translation of collective and personal memory. Through a medium which resists the thresholds of space and temporality, El Khash materializes the ruins of a site, destroyed by ISIS during the Syrian civil war, among an ecosystem of architecture, animal, and plant life. Agricultural archives, 3D models, and celestial scales generate an embodied experience of what is lost, foregrounding the value of digital preservation and production within majority diasporic populations – much of whom are attuned to the orchestrated destruction of the homeland."

Additional programming:

- An online conversation between Qaddah and El Khash
- A written response by Laura U. Marks

Presented with *Recollective: Vancouver Independent Archives Week*, a joint initiative of 221A, Artspeak, grunt gallery, Rung Magazine, the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, VIVO Media Arts Centre, and Western Front.

Concert

October 24-24, 2020

Meredith Bates with Josema Zamorano and Lief Hall

Sound Migrations

In *Sound Migrations*, Bates combined improvisations on her violin with projected images and manipulated surround sound, produced in collaboration with Vancouver-based photographer Josema Zamorano and vocalist and composer Lief Hall. The sound of flying birds and images of nature served to question the relationship of humans to borders: how are the imaginary lines which define nations permeable to the natural world and its creatures, but impassable to families, friends, and collaborators?

Residency

November 1, 2020 - February, 2021

Ian William Craig

Over the course of his residency at Western Front, Vancouver-based artist Ian William Craig explored the AC bias of tape machines. Typically, artists prefer recordings to be as noise-free and distortion-free as possible, but by electronically manipulating the bias so that it runs below 40,000 Hz, Craig turns this desire on its head, to create new sounds.

Residency

November 1, 2020 - April 30, 2021

Tiffany Ayalik

For her residency, Tiffany Ayalik revitalized songs of her Inuinnait ancestors and

community. Ayalik studied songs transcribed, notated, and documented through wax cylinder recordings by the anthropologist Diamond Jenness during the 1913-18 Canadian Arctic Expedition, and worked with Inuinait elders to further her understanding of the language. Using multi-channel audio and live vocal performance, she reinterpreted 6 songs as a new 30-minute composition. Ayalik will premiere the work at Western Front in November 2021.

Exhibition

November 12, 2020 - January 30, 2021
Craig Berggold, Marlene Creates, Kiss & Tell, Roy Kiyooka, Laiwan, Ken Lum and Melinda Mollineaux
Thought, outside

Independent curator Amy Kazymierchyk presented an exhibition of lens-based artworks by Craig Berggold, Marlene Creates, Kiss & Tell, Roy Kiyooka, Laiwan, Ken Lum, and Melinda Mollineaux produced between the 1970s and '90s. The works engaged then-emerging frameworks of multiplicity, plurality and decentering that make the contingent nature of the outside visible. Their anachronistic encounter drew attention to how artworks continue to think across the conditions of presentation.

Additional programming:

- Recorded artist talks with Craig Berggold, Laiwan, Melinda Mollineaux, Susan Stewart
- Presented with the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery at the University of British Columbia

Sound Installation

February 26-28, 2021

Ian William Craig
Twenty-One Blank Words

Craig has experimented with spatializing the outputs of four tape machines in the Grand

Luxe Hall. After creating an initial sound world, the piece becomes self-perpetuating: sound feeds back from the speakers through microphones and again through the tape, generating new sounds that repeat the process. Visitors were invited to enter the space and experience this work in progress.

Online Performance

March 31, 2021

Autumn Knight

For her engagement with Western Front, Knight was originally invited to present an exhibition and performance on-site in Vancouver. Within the context of COVID-19, in which travel and public gatherings are restricted, Knight instead made a new performance that was live-streamed online. Capitalizing on these limitations, Knight's new performance drew on her background in performance and video, with the frame of a live video stream becoming the proscenium stage. Using her studio in New York as a set, and working closely with animator Valerie Caesar, sound artist Levy Lorenzo, and a video production team of Ross Karre, Adele Fournet, and Merve Kayan who employed multiple cameras and switchers, Knight's new work pushed at the edges of what is "live."

Additional programming:

- An online conversation between Autumn Knight, dance artist Justine A. Chambers, and curator Pablo de Ocampo

Public Artwork

Ongoing

STSTS

Maggie Groat

This site-specific work by Maggie Groat works towards an associative consideration of the shifting histories and possible futures of Western Front's building.



Tiffany Ayalik
Itakaijuq (Tries to Remember) (2021)
production still
Photo: Benjamin Wilson



Ian William Craig
Twenty One Blank Words (2021)
sound installation
Courtesy the artist
Photo: Rachel Topham Photography



Laiwan

African Notes Part 1 & 2 (1982)

15:22mins, 149 b/w Pantomic-X 35mm
slides, 1/4 inch reel analogue audio tape
transferred to digital.

Installation photo Thought, outside (2020)

Courtesy the artist

Photo: Dennis Ha



Kate Metten
Licorice Long Neck Bottle (2020)
ceramic vase
Courtesy the artist.
Photo: Dennis Ha

DEVELOPMENT AND FUNDRAISING

Fundraising Event
December 1-6, 2020
Toque Craft Fair

This year, due to COVID-19 precautions, Toque Craft Fair went virtual. We created a new website, toquecraftfair.com, and Shopify store for the online sale, which made purchasing items from multiple vendors simple and straightforward. We invited 30 vendors to participate in our online marketplace and through their generous donation of 20% of their sales, we were able to raise over \$8,000 for Western Front's programs. In addition to our well-loved returning vendors, we invited some talented new artists and designers to the event, including Goodbeast, Haley Hunt-Brondwin, Kate Metten, See You Soon Studio, The Planet Sun Studio, and Woolf Glass. We also launched our Toque Instagram account which quickly grew to over 1,000 followers. An efficient pick-up window was implemented over a few days at Western Front to get Toque items into the hands of those who purchased them. We are incredibly grateful for our sponsors, Buy Low Foods, G&F Financial, and Mount Pleasant Business Improvement Area, who supported us during this shift, as well as the City of Vancouver, Vancouver is Awesome, and the Vancouver Public Library for providing advertising space.

SUPPORTERS

Support from annual donors, governments, and foundations enables Western Front to provide a multidisciplinary program. We extend our deepest gratitude for this support.

2020/21 Individual Donors and Members

\$10,000+

Audain Foundation

\$5,000+

Mona Hatoum

\$1,000+

Anonymous x 2

Mayon Adelaar

Michael Prout

Naudia & Mark Mache

\$250+

Grant Arnold

Joost Bakker

Steven Brekelmans

Hank Bull

Ron & Martha Burnett

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\$65+

Catherine V. Fraser

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Toque Vendors

a / i studio, Anita Sikma Design, AW by Andrea Wong, Cloth Tone, Cracher Dans La Soupe Parfum, Daisy Fung Flowers, Draw Me A Lion, Erin Templeton, fancypop, Goodbeast, Haley Hunt-Brondwin, Henderson Dry Goods, Julia Chirka, Kate Metten, Nathalee Paolinelli Ceramics, Nectrous Botanicals, NEW LooK, Paperbacknote, Project Weekend, See You Soon Studio, Simply Read Books, The Little Things, The Planet Sun Studio, Three Sisters by Emma, Tony Dubroy, tuk + milo, WarmAndDrift, Wasted Effort, Woodlot, Woolf Glass

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