

RIFUGIO DIGITALE

Florence, via della Fornace 41  
October 17, 2024

ore 6.30 p.m.

Opening event at Rifugio Digitale in the presence of the artists and curator Roï Saade.

From October 17 to November 3, 2024, Rifugio Digitale presents *AIR, RIVER, SEA, SOIL. A History of an Exploited Land*, a special project of the Middle East Now Festival. The exhibition, curated by Roï Saade, was developed collectively by the Access in the Making (AIM) Lab in 2022. AIM Lab is an anti-colonial, anti-ableist and feminist research lab that explores issues such as accessibility, disability, environment and care through creative experimentation, taking an innovative approach to accessibility in the arts. The event is organized in collaboration with Forma Editions.

*AIR, RIVER, SEA SOIL. A History of an Exploited Land* recounts how colonial rule, past and present, forced displacement of populations, land expropriation, political unrest, capitalist drives, wars and conflicts have transformed the Middle East and North Africa into a set of guarded and militarized territories that divide communities, block their movements and alienate them from their relationship with the land. As the capitalist and colonialist world order continues to vigorously extract the earth's natural resources for profit, local communities are forced to live in conditions of continued precariousness and abandonment. A phenomenon told through the work of five photographers and artists.

Starting in North Africa and specifically in northwestern Tunisia, **Zied Ben Romdhane** with *Lost in Moments* introduces us to the living conditions of villagers in the Jendouba region struggling to access clean water. From there we head to Egypt west of Alexandria, where Mohamed Mahdy with *Moon Dust* documents the effects of air pollution generated by a cement factory and its ominous consequences on the health of the inhabitants of Wadi El Qamar (Valley of the Moon). Moving east to Jordan, **Nadia Bseiso's Infertile Crescent** investigates the barren, scorched land of the modern Jordanian map and the environmental impacts that man-made borders have had on the environment of this once fertile region. From there we head to Lebanon, where **Roï Saade's** project *The Epic of Dalieh* chronicles the illegal privatization of land and sea in Beirut, drawing parallels with an ancient epic. Finally, we come to Iraq, where **Tamara Abdul Hadi** with *Re-imagining. Return to the Marshes* offers a way to reimagine and reclaim the narratives of the people and wetlands of southern Iraq, known as Al-Ahwar.

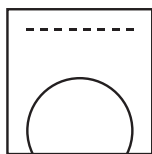


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RIFUGIO DIGITALE

***AIR, RIVER, SEA, SOIL.***  
***A History of an Exploited Land***

special project of  
**Middle East Now Festival**

**October 17 - November 3, 2024**  
Wed-Sun 11.00-19.00

**Rifugio Digitale**  
via della Fornace, 41  
50125 - Florence (FI)

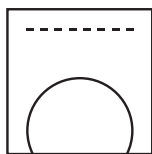


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## ZIED BEN ROMDHANE



Photo by Zied Ben Romdhane

The series of photographs taken by Zied Ben Romdhane is shot in Jendouba, a region in northwest Tunisia that is considered the country's main waterway and has several large dams. The villages near the city (Oumm el bichna, Wled thifallah, El grafa, Sloul) are small, scattered groups of a hundred or so people who struggle to gain access to clean water and rely on small mountain streams and wells usually infected with hepatitis A.

These people travel twice a week during the winter to get water, and the trip takes about an hour and a half.

Despite the short distance between the national dams and these small villages, there are no water pipes; the government company has developed a plan to connect these regions with drinking water but the project has been on hold for years.

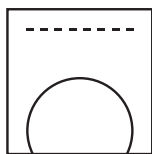


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## ZIED BEN ROMDHANE

Born in 1981 in Tunisia; began his career as a commercial photographer. In 2011 he decided to focus on documentary photography and photojournalism. His work has been published in "The New York Times" and "The Washington Post". His recent exhibitions include: *Views of Tunisia* (Arles 2013), *After the Revolution* (White Box, New York 2013), *Zones d'Attente* (Clark House, Bombay 2013), *Kushti* (Maison de la Tunisie, Paris 2013), *Fotofest Biennial at the Houston Center for Photography* (Houston, USA 2014),

*Sahel* (1x1 Gallery, Dubai 2014), *Trace* (MUCEM, Marseille 2015), *Afrotopia*, African biennial of photography (Bamako, Mali 2017) and the Biennial of Photography of the Contemporary Arab World (France, Paris 2017). In 2018, Romdhane published his first book, *West of Life*, with Red Hook Editions. Awards and honors received include selection for the World Press Photo Foundation's 2018 Prize 6x6 Global Talent Program, participation in World Press Photo's Joop Swart Masterclass, and winning the POPCAP award (Africa Image, Basel, 2015).



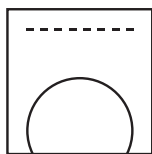
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**MOHAMED MAHDY**



Photo by Mohamed Mahdy

The Wadi El Qamar (Valley of the Moon) area is a residential area located in western Alexandria, Egypt, next to the Portland Cement Factory in Alexandria.

This area was discovered about 70 years ago and is inhabited today by nearly sixty thousand people, with historical documents attesting that the area was founded before the factory, since King Farouk was the tenth ruler of Egypt.

The number of people living in this area who have been infected by dust from the cement factories is nearly 30.000 inhabitants, or about 50 percent of the population.

The problem is that the cement factories still work with coal and waste, and the factory is only 10 kilometers away from the residential area, affecting the global climate change and air pollution rate in Egypt, which is one of the first and largest countries in terms of pollutant rate.

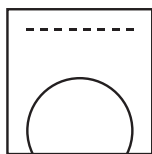


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## MOHAMED MAHDY

Mohamed Mahdy (Egypt, 1996) is a Visual storyteller based in Alexandria, Egypt, whose work focuses on buried and invisible communities in Egypt as well as cultural and social issues. She firmly believes that immersing herself in diverse communities and telling their stories means embedding these experiences permanently into the

fabric of a larger community. Her work has been exhibited at the 25th Youth Salon and the Ministry of Culture, as well as the Paris Biennale. He has exhibited twice with the Ian Parry Scholarship in London and also at Photoville in New York. In 2018 he was named by the New York Times Lens blog as one of 12 emerging photographers to know.

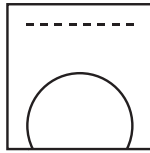


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**NADIA BSEISO**



Photo by Nadia Bseiso

Infertile Crescent is an attempt to visualize what happened to the “Fertile land”, which once stood as the cradle of civilization, the paradise of biodiversity with its marshlands and rivers that shaped the progress of humanity.

Today the crescent is anything but fertile. In the early 19th century it witnessed crucial geopolitical changes that made up this land transformed the region for a century to come. It escaped the hands of the Ottoman Empire, only to fall to British-French colonialism. Regaining its independence years later, it was rebuilt, mapped out and divided into small states that currently make up the new contemporary Middle East.

There was a time when man had a maternal relationship with Mother Nature. When the sun burned his land, man cried for Nature to spare some rain. Women who could not have children would punish their bodies by soaking them in hot springs as they asked Nature for forgiveness. Mother Nature listened to their

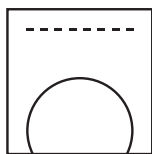


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tears and granted them rain and children.

The artist explores the 180-kilometer route of the future Red Sea-Dead Sea aqueduct, a joint project between Jordan, Israel and Palestine to provide much-needed water, and delves into the intricacies of Jordanian geopolitics across its northern border, where fertility traces are traced in its rich mountains.

*Infertile Crescent* seeks to provide an answer to what has happened in man's relationship with the land in this once thriving region.

## NADIA BSEISO

lis a Jordanian documentary photographer based in Amman. She received a bachelor's degree in photography from Florence, Italy, in 2011, and in 2015 was awarded an artist residency at the Fondazione Fotografia in Modena, Italy. She focuses on long-term projects based on personal research in geopolitics, history, anthropology and environmental degradation. In 2016, she was selected for the Arab Documentary Photography Program, funded by the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture, the Magnum Foundation and the Prince Claus Fund, for her project *Infertile Crescent*.

She was selected as a photographer to follow globally by Time - Light Box in March 2017. She has worked with several local and international NGOs since 2011. Her clients include Unicef, The New York Times, The Telegraph, Reuters, Zeit magazine, The Intercept, The Globe and Mail, and U.S. News & World Report.



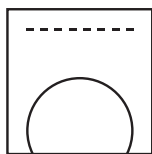
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## ROÏ SAADE



Photo by Roï Saade

In Beirut, Dalieh is the city's last natural outcropping and a shared space where the public can freely access the shoreline for recreational purposes. But today, this last informal space is on the verge of disappearing as the land has been ceded to large developers with plans to build a private resort.

In his research, the artist found parallels in the epic "Dionysiaca," written by Nonnos of Panopolis in the fifth century AD. Beroë, the nymph-goddess representing the city of Beirut in Phoenicia (present-day Lebanon), was courted by two gods, Dionysus and Poseidon, becoming the object of a furious struggle between them. In their struggle, both gods unleash their wrath, regardless of the damage and destruction they inflict on nature, and this becomes a metaphor that shapes the artist's story about Dalieh and the people who use it, while also examining the relationship and conflict with nature.

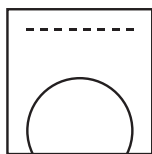


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Mythology becomes the narrative thread through which the artist addresses and speaks about one of the last remaining public spaces in Beirut. This project led to a series of photographic experiments with salt water and earth, and an open conversation with nature.

## ROÏ SAADE

Is an interdisciplinary artist interested in the intersection of graphic design, photography and visual arts and curator of the exhibition *AIR, RIVER, SEA, SOIL. A History of an Exploited Land*, at Rifugio Digitale.

His process-based practice is grounded in a close collaboration between artist, designer and curator. His approach is enriched by careful visual research and creative exchange. Roï is interested in finding and creating ways to resist systems of domination and inequality.

As a photographer, his work seeks to investigate individual and collective identity and experience

through the documentation of social and personal encounters. He often collaborates with Tamara Abdul Hadi, his life and vision partner.

His virtual studio deals with projects such as branding, cultural and artistic projects, and publications. Roï has designed and curated exhibitions, corporate identities, magazines and specialized in book design, where he combines his passion for photography and design.

Roï holds an MFA in Graphic Design from USEK University in Lebanon. He is currently a Research Associate at the Access in the Making research lab at Concordia University in Montreal.



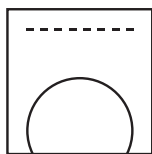
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TAMARA ABDUL HADI



Photo by Tamara Abdul Hadi

Between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, in what was once the center of Mesopotamia, lies a wetland known as Al-Ahwar in southern Iraq. It was in this place that, between the fourth and third millennia B.C.E., the Sumerians built their houses from the native reeds of the marshes, an ancient architectural practice still followed today. Under the constant threat of drought, the swamps represent the livelihood of thousands of families who currently live there, raising buffalo, fishing, and collecting and selling reeds as a way of life.

With this work, *Re-Imagining Return to the Marshes*, the artist offers a critical response to the book *Return to the Marshes*, by Young and Wheeler (published in 1977).

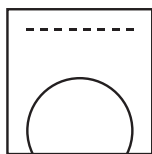


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She intervenes, intrudes, and interrupts their pages with her photographic documentation of Iraqi marshes and archival images from Iraqis in Iraq and the diaspora. This work presents her images and archival images from other Iraqis as a way to further reimagine and reclaim the narratives of these marshes.

### TAMARA ABDUL HADI

Is an Iraqi photographer whose work deals with the historical and contemporary representation of her culture in its diversity. In addition to being a photographer, Tamara is an educator who has taught photography courses in Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Tunisia, and Canada. Her work has been published in The New York Times, The Guardian, The Wall Street Journal, The Financial Times, The National, Huck Magazine, VICE, Slate and others. Abdul Hadi was a founder of Rawiya Collective, a cooperative of female photographers in the Middle East. She is a member of We Are The Medium, an art collective of

interdisciplinary artists working independently. She frequently collaborates with Roï Saade, her partner in life and vision. Tamara holds an MFA from Emily Carr University of Art and Design. Her photographs have been exhibited in the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Kuwait, France, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Spain, Hungary, Canada and the United States.

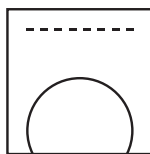


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***A History of an Exploited Land***  
**17.10-03.11.2024**

MOSTRA PROMOSSA DA  
*AN EXHIBITION PROMOTED BY*  
Rifugio Digitale

PROGETTO SPECIALE DI  
*SPECIAL PROJECT OF*  
Middle East Now Festival

IN COLLABORAZIONE CON  
*IN COLLABORATION WITH*  
Forma Edizioni

DIREZIONE ARTISTICA  
*ART DIRECTION*  
Laura Andreini

MOSTRA A CURA DI  
*EXHIBIT CURATED BY*  
Roï Saade

TESTI IN MOSTRA  
*EXHIBITION TEXTS*  
Roï Saade

MUSICA DI  
MUSIC OF  
*Love Song, Folk Music of Palestine,*  
*Smithsonian Folkways Recordings,*  
*1951 (Male singer, violinist, 'ud,*  
*durbakki, and kanoun players)*  
edited by Arianna Iodice

COORDINAMENTO SCIENTIFICO  
*SCIENTIFIC COORDINATION*

Beatrice Papucci  
Andrea Benelli  
Chiara Mezzabotta  
Arianna Iodice  
Ester Menichelli

TESTI IN MOSTRA  
*EXHIBITION TEXTS*  
Roï Saade

UFFICIO STAMPA E COMUNICAZIONE  
*PRESS OFFICE AND COMMUNICATION*  
Associazione Rifugio Digitale  
Niccolò Natali  
Giulia Guasti  
Eugenio Pincelli

INSTALLAZIONE VIDEO  
*VIDEO INSTALLATION*  
Rifugio Digitale

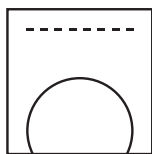


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## Forma Edizioni

Forma is an editorial (publishing) initiative developed in order to allow the dissemination and knowledge of avenues and experiences belonging to the world of art, architecture photography and more generally, to promote the best research in production and technology, following the changing lifestyles and contemporary living. Since its foundation in 2010, the catalogue has grown with about twenty titles a year giving "form" to the expressive traces that animate today's cultural debate, deepening both specific areas of knowledge already known to the public, and investigating those intellectual and artistic areas considered, for various reasons, revealing new points of observation of reality. A common feature of each project is the high quality of the product, images, printing, typographic or IT processes used, as well as a targeted diffusion and distribution in places of use, such as specialized bookstores, museum bookshops and exhibition sites, which they add to the normal availability on the net that necessary and indispensable presence in the "sites" where opinions and evaluations of merit are built. The publications range from, important monographs dedicated to contemporary and renowned architectural works, such as *Cantina Antinori, to chronicle of the construction of a new landscape*, research and insights related to university study issues, catalogues of important exhibitions, such as the one hosted at the Cini Foundation of Venice *EST. Italian travel, city and architecture stories* curated by Luca Molinari or the monographic exhibition hosted at the MAXXI Museum in Rome *Gio Ponti. Love architecture* in 2019.

Exhibitions and events expand the cultural enhancement process that Forma sets out to offer to a refined and attentive public. The publishing house is in fact involved in the creation of volumes relating to the exhibitions annually hosted at the Forte di Belvedere in Florence or at the Stefano Bardini Museum and to the monographic exhibitions hosted in private galleries dedicated to artists of the calibre of Alighiero Boetti, Arnaldo Pomodoro, Lucio Fontana and Alberto Burri. There is no shortage of photography and design texts, such as the important monograph dedicated to the work and life of Karim Rashid, or the overview of contemporary Milanese design *The Design City. Milan city laboratory*. The on the road city architectural guide series is currently under construction. Mainly focused on contemporary works, each volume investigates the peculiar aspects of the most important cities in the world, proposing a critical reading of future scenarios. The publishing house has counted important collaborations with personalities of high intellectual depth and international fame such as the late Adolfo Natalini, founder architect of Superstudio, Bruno Corà, Luca Massimo Barbero and Sergio Risaliti, art critics and historians, Luca Molinari, architecture critic.

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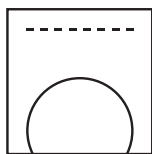


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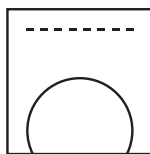


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## Rifugio Digitale

Rifugio Digitale (Digital Refuge) is a new exhibition space in a former bomb shelter tunnel repurposed as a site devoted to the promotion of digital art, where architecture, design, photography, cinema, literature and all the other multiple forms of art and visual expression find their dimension and interact with one another. It was built on the foundations of an old anti-aircraft tunnel that served from 1943 as a bomb shelter in World War II. It was known as the "Forge Refuge" a safe haven during the tragedy of the war, and now it has been rechristened as the "Digital Refuge"; a place of rebirth, where technology meets art, offering a contemporary space where people can explore creativity through the modern language of technology.

The requalification project, handled by Archea Associati, will house digital expressions of every kind, with an eye always on the future and on the new vanguards. In collaboration with the publisher Forma Edizioni, it will house exhibitions, but also events and performances related to art, architecture, photography, literature, cinema and other initiatives linked to the digital world. It will show original views and more on the 16 screens positioned along the 33 meters of the tunnel, a new idea for Florence where the connection between art, people and technology generates an intense visual experience, unexpected and interactive. It is a space designed for constant change, always dynamic, with a new and exciting speed that distinguishes it from a traditional art gallery.

Rifugio Digitale occupies an area of 165 square meters and is a versatile structure ideal for organizing exhibitions, events, presentation, but also debates, lectures and simple discussions. It is expected to appeal to a vast public desirous of indulging their interest in ideas and novel cultural experiences right in the heart of Florence.



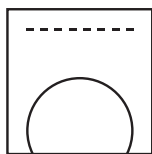
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Archea Associati, Rifugio Digitale, Florence, 2022  
ph. Pietro Savorelli & Associati



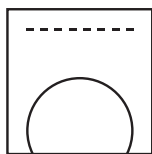
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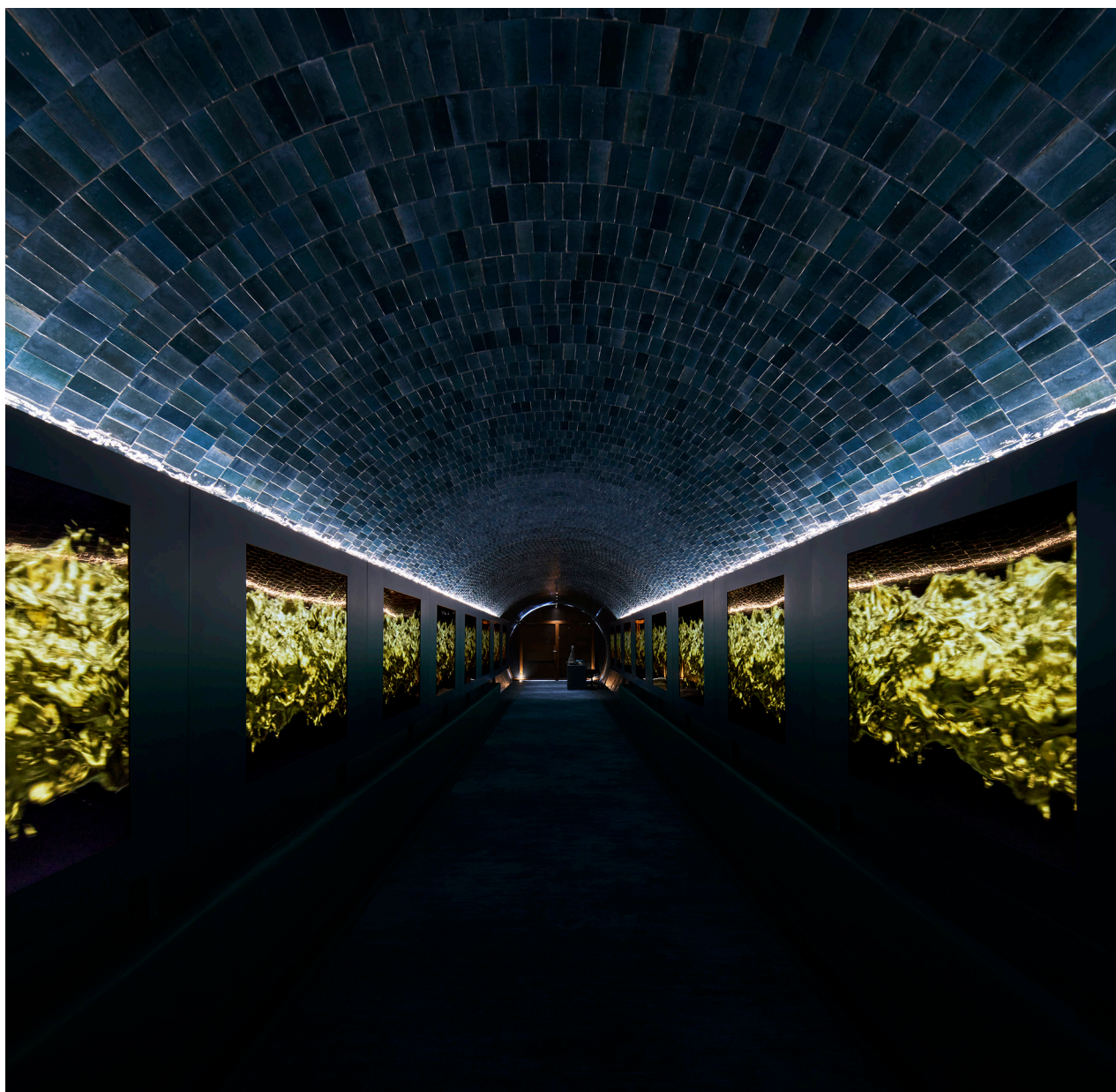
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