

When Susan Rothenberg died in 2020 at the age of 75, the *New Yorker* art critic Peter Schjeldahl noted that the groundbreaking artist had yet to receive a major museum retrospective.

Perhaps such an exhibit is still to come. Meanwhile, Rothenberg fans can visit the Hall Art Foundation in Reading to see a survey of nearly 30 paintings and drawings spanning her career from 1974 to 2012. Most of the works come from the foundation's collection, with some loaned by Sperone Westwater, Rothenberg's New York City gallery for 33 years, and other sources.

Titled simply "Susan Rothenberg," the exhibit first appeared at Kunstmuseum Schloss Derneburg, a 1,000-year-old castle in northern Germany that Andy and Christine Hall rehabilitated to show art owned by them and their foundation. (They likewise refurbished the Vermont venue, a former dairy and horse farm.) Maryse Brand organized the Derneburg exhibition in collaboration with Rothenberg and the Halls for a 2020 opening. Delayed by the pandemic, that show came to fruition in 2021, too late for the artist to see.

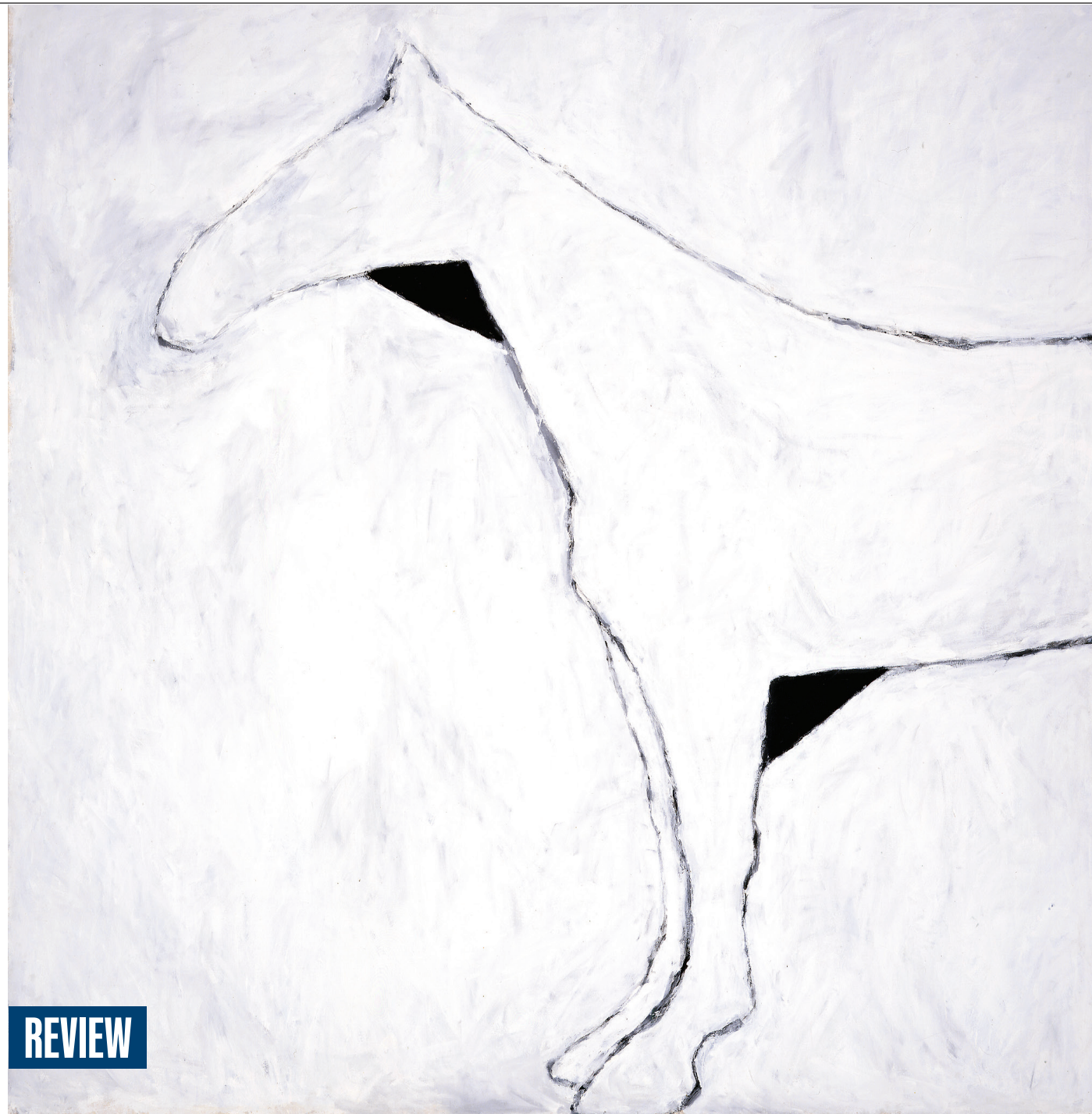
Rothenberg was "an artist's artist," said Brand, who worked at Sperone Westwater for eight years before moving to the Hall in 2005. During a recent tour of the Reading exhibit, Brand said she received a "flurry of positive feedback" from artists grateful for the show.

Born in Buffalo, N.Y., Rothenberg earned a degree in fine arts at Cornell University in 1967 before moving to New York City. There, she shocked the art world by reintroducing figuration at a time when minimalist and conceptual art reigned and painting had been declared dead.

In a moment that Schjeldahl described as having an "asteroidal impact," Rothenberg showed three paintings featuring monumental horses at a SoHo gallery in 1975. The Hall show includes one of them, "Algarve," a 112-by-110-inch canvas in acrylic and tempera.

The painting depicts the front half of a horse in profile, outlined in black on an abstract background of muddled grayish whites. In an illusionistic touch, one of its two hooves oversteps the bottom edge of the canvas. Yet black triangles under the neck and leg and a continuation of the background inside the horse's outline flatten the image, creating a strange straddling of abstraction and figuration.

Rothenberg's horses are understood to function as stand-ins for the human figure; by her own admission, she cared nothing about horses or horse paintings. (Ironically,



REVIEW

An Artist's Artist

Hall Art Foundation presents a survey of works by the late painter Susan Rothenberg

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her second husband, artist Bruce Nauman, balances his artistic life with training and selling horses.) But the presence of the powerful animal in her work nevertheless introduced emotion — something deliberately withheld in, say, Donald Judd's boxes, Agnes Martin's grids or Frank Stella's pinstripe paintings.

"Algarve" is the apt centerpiece in the Hall's horse barn gallery, which shows Rothenberg's work up to 1990. That's the year she relocated to Galisteo, N.M., to live with Nauman in a house the couple

had designed for themselves. Dark and gray-white tones dominate the earlier, urban paintings — a palette, Rothenberg has commented, that also reflected the struggle of her 1979 divorce from sculptor George Trakas, with whom she had a daughter in 1972.

Her 1980s paintings aren't just dark; they're textured. Rothenberg switched to oils during this period on the advice of her artist friend Elizabeth Murray. "Elizabeth" (1984-85) is a portrait of a half-nude Murray rendered in an explosion of brushstrokes

that unite the figure with her similarly painted background.

Rothenberg also painted, in 1985, a series of portraits of Piet Mondrian; the Hall show includes "A Golden Moment," whose layered backstory can be accessed via QR codes on the sole wall label in each building. But the painting of Murray is particularly significant: One of the few acclaimed female artists of her era, Rothenberg helped promote other women in the profession.

In a 1984 interview with the *New York Times*, she recalled, "I got sick of people



SHE SHOCKED THE ART WORLD BY REINTRODUCING FIGURATION AT A TIME WHEN MINIMALIST AND CONCEPTUAL ART REIGNED.



saying, 'How does it feel to be the only woman in the show?' And I would reply, 'It feels lousy, it's not fair.' Finally, I said, 'If I'm the only woman, I won't be in it.'" (Alas, Rothenberg is surrounded by men at the Hall: Two other exhibitions feature Andy Warhol and Ron Gorchov.)

In the Hall's cow barn, 18 large works represent the last 30 years of Rothenberg's life. Living in the Southwest changed her color palette. She dove into reds and greens, albeit muddled rather than straight from the tube. And she continued fearlessly to disregard both artistic convention and the confines of the canvas. Rothenberg's figures, both human and animal, are occasionally inscrutable and often merely suggested by a few discreet body parts.

"I've never felt comfortable painting a complete figure," the artist said in a 2005 episode of Art21's "Art in the Twenty-First Century" on PBS. "I don't want to get too literal about things; I want the viewer to be able to do the work, too."

In "Boodis and Kiggy," a 58.75-by-61-inch painting, a reddish-purple human arm and leg followed by a dog with nose to the ground crowd the left and bottom sides of the canvas. The marching pair seem not to notice the prairie dog-like figure confronting them, an arrangement that suggests a layering of perspectives to make a story. "Dog and Snake" portrays the animals' confrontation in body fragments amid an abstract swath of yellows.

One late series is based on fragmented marionettes or prosthetics, including "The Master," in which a pair of isolated yellow arms and a floating yellow face manipulate various jointed limbs. The motion of the "master" is conveyed through repetition: One of the yellow arms appears twice. As in "Boodis and Kiggy," a good portion of the canvas is a textured void; meanwhile, its top edge abruptly cuts off some fingers and limbs.

What seems to interest Rothenberg in these paintings is how color and perspective

Clockwise from top left: "Algarve"; "Elizabeth"; "Boodis and Kiggy"; "The Master"

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SEVEN DAYS MAY 31-JUNE 7, 2023

MIDDLEBURY AREA SHOWS << P.56

19TH CENTURY VERMONT SAMPLERS: An exhibition of needlework samplers made by young girls in the 19th-century that depict alphabets, numerals and decorative elements. Through January 13. **VARIETY SEW: A SAMPLING OF TEXTILE TOOLS AND DEVICES:** Sewing machines, spinning wheels and myriad sewing paraphernalia from the permanent collection. Reception: Thursday, June 8, 5-7 p.m. Through September 30. Info, 388-2117. Henry Sheldon Museum of Vermont History in Middlebury.

CARLA WEEKS: "Verdant," large paintings that examine the relationship between architecture and nature, all in green. Through June 15. Info, 877-2173. Northern Daughters in Vergennes.

'COASTING': Works by Liz Hoag, Tim Horn, James Kimak, Jay Lagemann, Lori Mehta and Janis Sanders featuring summertime views of Maine, Massachusetts and New York. **RORY JACKSON:** "Seasonal Majesty," a solo exhibition of new paintings by the local artist. Reception: Thursday, June 8, 5-6:30 p.m. Through June 27. Info, 989-7419. Edgewater Gallery on the Green in Middlebury.

'LIFT EVERY VOICE': An exhibition of 15 hooked rugs reproduced from the "I Am a Black Woman" series by Elizabeth Catlett (1947). Guest curated by Maddy Fraioli. Through June 10. Info, 877-3406. Rokeby Museum in Ferrisburgh.

'TOSSED': Nearly 20 works that make use of found, discarded or repurposed materials, curated by museum exhibition designer Ken Pohlman. Through December 10. **RECENT ACQUISITIONS:** An exhibition of more than 30 recent additions to the museum's permanent collection, including work by Veronica Ryan, Sean Scully, Joan Snyder, John Steuart Curry, Fidelia Bridges, James McNeil Whistler and others. Through August 6. Info, 443-5007. Middlebury College Museum of Art.

TEXTURE: Artworks that are rough, soft, scratchy, silky, furry or glossy in a variety of mediums by more than 50 artists. Through July 8. Info, 989-7225. Sparrow Art Supply in Middlebury.

'VESSELS AND VANISHING POINTS': An exhibition of contemporary ceramics by Nicholas Bernard and Judy Jackson, photography by Caleb Kenna, paintings by Alexis Serio and glass work by Tsuga Studios. Through June 18. Info, 458-0098. Edgewater Gallery at the Falls in Middlebury.

WINSLOW COLWELL: "#Skylights," paper constructions, light boxes, kite art and folded lanterns by the Ripton artist. Through June 10. Info, 382-9222. Jackson Gallery, Town Hall Theater, in Middlebury.

rutland/killington

NEW MEMBERS EXHIBITION: Fused-glass work by Garrett Sadler, wood crafts by Guy Rossi, landscape paintings by Brian Hewitt, pastel paintings of animals and nature by Lynn Austin, and sculpture and realist paintings by Liza Myers. Through October 31. Info, 247-4956. Brandon Artists Guild.

upper valley

'ELECTRICITY': Photographs by Natalie Boze and paintings in various mediums by Becky Cook that encompass nature and manmade structures, real or imagined. Through June 29. Info, artbcook@gmail.com. Norwich Public Library.

JOHN LEHET: "Spring Hopes Eternal," seasonal nature-based photography. Through July 3. Info, 295-4567. Long River Gallery in White River Junction.

LYNN GRAZNAK: "I Dream the Ghosts of Houses," video art by the multidisciplinary artist. Through May 31. Free. Info, 295-6688. Junction Arts & Media in White River Junction.

northeast kingdom

ANN CREAVEN: "Black & White and In Between," photographs. Through June 27. Info, 525-3366. Parker Pie in West Glover.

DELIA ROBINSON: "Magical Thinking," narrative daydream-inspired paintings by the Vermont artist. Through June 4. Info, 533-2000. Highland Center for the Arts in Greensboro.

'IN FOCUS': A group exhibition of photographs by Rob Boskind, Lawrence Cincotta, Karl Ehrlich, Steve Malshuk, Elinor Osborne and Ralph Zimmerman. Through June 17. Info, 334-1966. MAC Center for the Arts Gallery in Newport.

MARY TAPOGNA: "Hail Mary, Full of Glass," mosaic works using found and recycled materials and depicting religious and secular subjects. Through July 1. Info, 748-0158. Northeast Kingdom Artisans Guild Backroom Gallery in St. Johnsbury.

ROSS CONNELLY: "Variables," photographs by the Hardwick-based photographer and retired journalist. Through June 30. Info, oliveyin1@gmail.com. 3rd Floor Gallery in Hardwick.

'TEETERING BETWEEN': Paintings, photography and sculpture by Molly Boone, Linda Bryan, Harrison Halaska and Mike Howat, curated by Samantha M. Eckert of AVA Gallery and Art Center. **WILLIAM BETCHER:** "Ghosts: Civil War Portraits," a reanimation of daguerreotypes, ambrotypes and tintypes of soldiers and women in the 19th century using modern technology. Through June 4. Info, 748-2600. Catamount Arts Center in St. Johnsbury.

'WONDERLANDS': Paintings of Cuba by James Rauchman and figurative works by the late self-taught artist Gayleen Aiken. Through June 30. Info, 533-9370. GRACE in Hardwick.

YOUNG ARTISTS SHOW: A group exhibition of works by area kids and young adults. Through May 31. Info, melmelts@yahoo.com. The Satellite Gallery in Lyndonville.

brattleboro/okemo valley

ANDY WARHOL: "Small Is Beautiful," 100 of the artist's smaller-format paintings, from the Hall collection.

RON GORCHOV: A 50-year survey of the American abstract artist's work, featuring shaped canvases from the 1970s to large-scale paintings in his last years.

SUSAN ROTHENBERG: Nearly 30 figurative, gestural paintings by the late American artist from throughout her career. Weekends only, reservation required. Through November 26. Info, info@hallartfoundation.org. Hall Art Foundation in Reading.

'THE ART OF HANDMADE PHOTOGRAPHY': A group exhibition in a variety of genres, mediums, styles, sizes and approaches by more than 30 local and national photographers, juried by Dale Rio. Through July 2. Info, 251-6051. Vermont Center for Photography in Brattleboro.

'KEITH HARING: SUBWAY DRAWINGS': Samples from the more than 5,000 chalk drawings the New York City artist made from 1980 to 1985 in subway stations.

CATHY CONE: "Portals and Portraits," modified tintypes and mixed media by the Vermont photographer that speak to the power and limitations of memory. **DANIEL CALLAHAN:** "En-MassQ," works from two series in which the Boston-based artist painted his own face and the faces of others and detailed the performances with photographs, writing, and audio and visual vignettes.

JUAN HINOJOSA: "Paradise City," collaged figures made from found objects that reflect on the challenges of immigrants creating a new home in a new place.

MITSUKO BROOKS: "Letters Mingle Souls," mail art that incorporates imaginary letters addressed by survivors to their deceased loved ones and explores the impacts of mental illness and suicide. Through June 11. Info, 257-0124. Brattleboro Museum & Art Center.

CHARLES W. NORRIS-BROWN: "Distant Thunder Studio," original artworks from the late artist's graphic novel *Thunder Basin* within a recreation of his studio as an interactive exhibition. Through June 10. **THE SPRING SALON:** Artwork in a variety of mediums by 35 area artists. Through June 3. Info, 289-0104. Canal Street Art Gallery in Bellows Falls.

JOHN R. KILLACKY: "Flux," an exhibition of objects from a wordless, process-based video inspired by scores, propositions and performative actions

of Fluxus-era artists; cinematography by Justin Bunnell, editing by C. Alec Kozlowski and sound composition by Sean Clute. Through August 30. Info, 257-7898. CX Silver Gallery in Brattleboro.

KAREN BECKER: "Bearing Witness, Part 2," a 40-year retrospective of artworks in a variety of mediums featuring landscapes and animals. Through August 13. Info, 387-0102. Next Stage Arts Project in Putney.

manchester/bennington

ALBERTO REY: "Cultural Landscapes," a major exhibition featuring the artist's Battenkill River project, including large-scale paintings, drawings, notes and photographs; as well as Rey's Cuban heritage and bicultural identity. Through June 25. Info, 367-1311. Southern Vermont Arts Center in Manchester.

'A HISTORY OF BENNINGTON': An exhibition of artifacts that invites viewers to examine how history informs and affects our lives. Through December 31. **'NEBIZUN: WATER IS LIFE':** An exhibition of artwork by Abenaki artists of the Champlain Valley and Connecticut River Valley regions to illustrate the Abenaki relationship to water, our awareness of water as a fundamental element necessary for all life, and concern about pollution of our water. Curated by Vera Longtoe Sheehan. Through July 26. Info, 447-1571. Bennington Museum.

MATT BROWN: Color woodblock prints in the Japanese hanga style by the New Hampshire artist. Through July 31. Info, 362-1405. curATE café in Manchester.

SPRING/SUMMER 2023 MEMBER EXHIBITION: An annual exhibition of works in painting, drawing, prints, textile/fiber, sculpture, photography, ceramics and more by member artists. Through July 16. Info, 362-1405. Yester House Galleries, Southern Vermont Arts Center, in Manchester.

randolph/royalton

CAROLINE TAVELLI-ABAR AND MARJORIE RYERSON: "Full Circle," ink and watercolor abstract paintings, and poetry; and "Mother Nature's Liquid Gift," a retrospective of water-inspired photography and poetry. Through May 31. Info, artetcvt@gmail.com. ART, etc. in Randolph.

JOHN DOUGLAS: "My World in Black and White," photographs by the Vershire artist. Through June 10. Info, 889-3525. The Tunbridge General Store Gallery.

'RE: VISIONS': A group exhibition of artworks in various mediums by local artists. Through July 1. Info, 728-9878. Chandler Center for the Arts in Randolph.

outside vermont

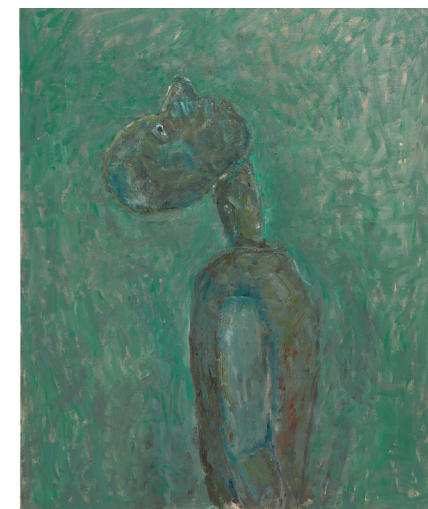
'AN ASSEMBLAGE OF BREATHS': The third annual exhibition in support of mental health awareness, in collaboration with West Central Behavioral Health, featuring 30 regional artists. Through June 17. **KATHY BLACK, MICHAEL HEFFERNAN, SUSAN CALZA & HARRISON HALASKA:** Paintings and video installation by the regional artists in four galleries. Through June 3. Info, 603-448-3117. AVA Gallery and Art Center in Lebanon, N.H.

'VIEWS OF WITHIN: PICTURING THE SPACES WE INHABIT': More than 60 paintings, photographs, prints, installations and textile works from the museum's collection that present one or more evocations of interior space. Through June 30. **DEMPSEY BOB:** "Wolves," a retrospective of totem poles, sculptures and masks by the Canadian master carver. Through September 10. Info, 514-285-2000. Montréal Museum of Fine Arts.

'PRINTING THE REVOLUTION! THE RISE AND IMPACT OF CHICANO GRAPHICS, 1965 TO NOW': A Smithsonian American Art Museum traveling exhibition featuring 119 artworks by more than 74 artists of Mexican descent and allied artists active in Chicanx networks. Through June 11. **KENT MONKMAN:** "The Great Mystery," four new paintings by the Cree artist along with five works in the museum's collection that inspired them, by Hannes Beckmann, T.C. Cannon, Cyrus Edwin Dallin, Mark Rothko and Fritz Scholder. Through December 9. Info, 603-646-2808. Hood Museum, Dartmouth College, in Hanover, N.H. ☺



From top: "Pecos Pink"; "Olive"



An Artist's Artist << P.53

can be used to explore sometimes opaque personal moments. "Blue Flash" is a 68-by-77-inch canvas covered in a dirty white; its upper half contains two sections of a brown body, as if it were partly submerged in the white background. A blue line extends from near one eye. Brand confirmed that the figure has been interpreted to represent Nauman, but the blue flash could be anything: a sudden insight, a flash of pain.

Rothenberg stated in another Art21 episode, "I think I care about beauty, but I don't go for it."

Many of the works at the Hall contain a kind of beauty, certainly of color. Something else is at work, though, in the way Rothenberg's compositions transcend the strictures of the rectangular canvas and viewers' expectations of perspective. She called that something "truth — some kind of truth about some kind of thing." That, perhaps, has its own kind of beauty. ☺

INFO

Susan Rothenberg, through November 26 at Hall Art Foundation in Reading. hallartfoundation.org



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