

stories over art

middle east & beyond

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#8



ART & DESIGN | ARCHITECTURE | FASHION | INTERVIEWS | COMMENTARY | FILM | MUSIC | PERFORMANCE | PHOTOGRAPHY | FEATURES | REVIEWS

EDITOR'S NOTE



Time-Space – Memories: Shrutika Gosavi

Winter in the UAE is a beautiful time, not only because we get to experience nature at its best but also because the country devotes itself to bringing in more arts in all forms during this time. From concerts to theatrical productions, art festivals to workshops, pop-ups, and more, the outdoor spaces become places to hang around and absorb the arts. Be it while attending the Quoz Fest in Alserkal Avenue, Dubai, or engaging with arts at Ras Al Khaimah Art Festival at the Al Jazeera Al Hamra Heritage Village.

There are many invitations and temptations. As goes the joke, every winter, the art calendars get busy with all of us hopping from galleries to shows, sometimes overwhelming, too. As you buy the tickets, get the autographs, or even ask for complimentary passes — do yourself a favor, leave your phone behind, at least for a bit, and slowly consume the words, the brush strokes, and the beats, and watch how it teaches you a bit about yourself and the world we live in.

Leaving you with art news from our end, stories over art, is now a Media Partner for the much-looked-forward-to World Art Dubai (WAD), the largest art fair in the MENA region, returning for its 11th edition from 17–20 April 2025 at the Dubai World Trade Centre. WAD will present over 10,000 artworks from more than 400 artists and galleries

across 65+ countries, creating an immersive space for discovery and innovation. It's a big one for us, for it was only in July 2024 that this magazine stemmed from creating a space where anyone who loves creative expression could share their love for various forms of art — theatrical productions, comedy gigs, ornate sculptures, outfits on the runway, dance rehearsals, strokes on canvas, and more. We've grown gradually and aim only to connect with more of you from the art fraternity as we go along. And to now be the Media Partners for World Art Dubai only makes us happier!

P.S: In an era of ChatGPT and Paywalls, we're daring to create original content and offer it to our readers without a fee. Your support would go a long way. Subscribe to the portal and meet us on social media as well.



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INTERVIEW

TAISIA KOROTKOVA

Taisia Korotkova, born in Moscow, Russia, in 1980, is a contemporary artist based in Milan, Italy. She is a Moscow Academic Art College graduate, named after V.I. Surikov (1991–1998), and the Moscow State Academic Art Institute named after V.I. Surikov (1998–2004). In addition, she studied at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Moscow (2002–2003) and has been a member of the Moscow Union of Artists since 2004. Korotkova has received several prestigious accolades, including the 2010 Kandinsky Prize for Artist of the Year for her “Reproduction” series and a grant from the Ministry of Culture of Russia in 2004.

Throughout her career, she has held numerous solo exhibitions, such as Magic Forest at the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow (2021), New Habitat at Köttinspektionen in Uppsala (2018), and Reproduction at the Triumph Gallery in Moscow (2012). Her work has also been featured in group exhibitions internationally, including GENERATION XXI at the State Tretyakov Gallery (2020) and the Ural Biennial of Contemporary Art (2017). Korotkova’s art has been showcased at significant venues across Europe and Russia, including the Swedish Family exhibition at Uppsala Konstmuseum (2010) and the Fifth Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art (2014). She has also contributed to numerous publications, such as Frozen Dreams: Contemporary Art from Russia (2011). With her diverse body of work, Korotkova remains a prominent figure in contemporary art.



INTERVIEW

What's your earliest memory of creating art?

When I was five, my father gave me a box of gouache colors and some brushes as a birthday gift. He showed me how to use them, and I still remember the smell of that paint. My favorite subjects were horses and ladies.

If you could collaborate with any artist, living or dead, who would it be and why?

Pieter De Hoogh, asking him about his compositional secrets would be amazing.

What's the weirdest thing you've ever used as a medium/tool/platform in your artwork?

Textile dust from the drying/ iron machine. I built a flying ghost house-bunker from it for my exhibition Dark Forest.

How do you come up with the titles for your pieces?

Usually, I start the project by writing down sentences regarding the topic of the future work, so the title often appears from those notes.

What's the most unusual source of inspiration you've ever had?

Anesthesia in hospital.

If you could only use three colors/instruments/software for the rest of your life, which would you choose?

Paper, soft pencil, and eraser. Everything else (colors, for example) I can take from nature.

What piece of art do you take the most pride in and why?

Ancient Greek sculpture. I wonder how they combined realistic and idealistic shapes and, as a result, got such a humane, alive character.

If your art had a soundtrack, what would be the top three songs on it?

It's too difficult to choose!

How do you deal with a creative block?

I don't remember if I had one in my entire life.

What's one piece of advice you'd give to ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE aspiring to replace ARTISTS?

Try to make mistakes.



What would you be doing if you weren't an artist?

Paleontologist or gardener.

What's the strangest place you've ever found inspiration for a piece?

Hospital

What's your favorite part about the process of creating art?

Finishing the work

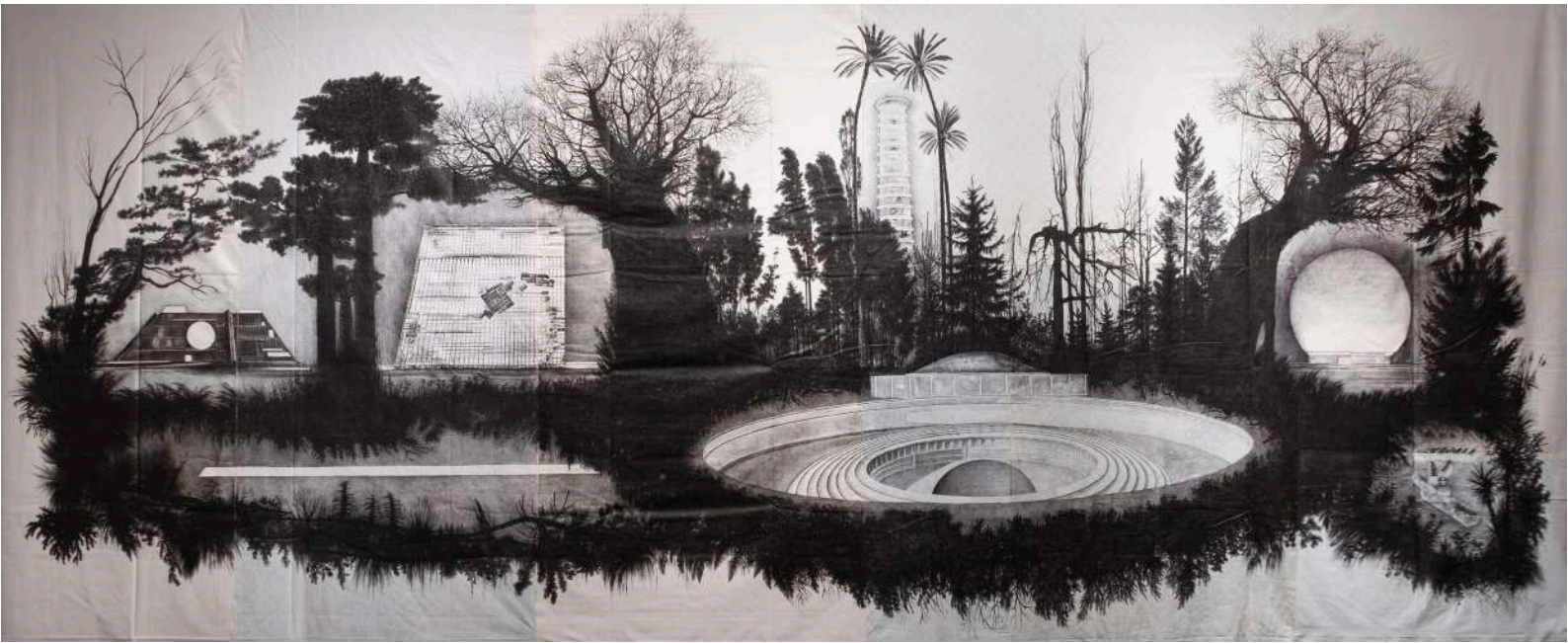
If you could have your artwork displayed anywhere in the world, where would it be?

Space station

What's one thing people would be surprised to learn about you as an artist?

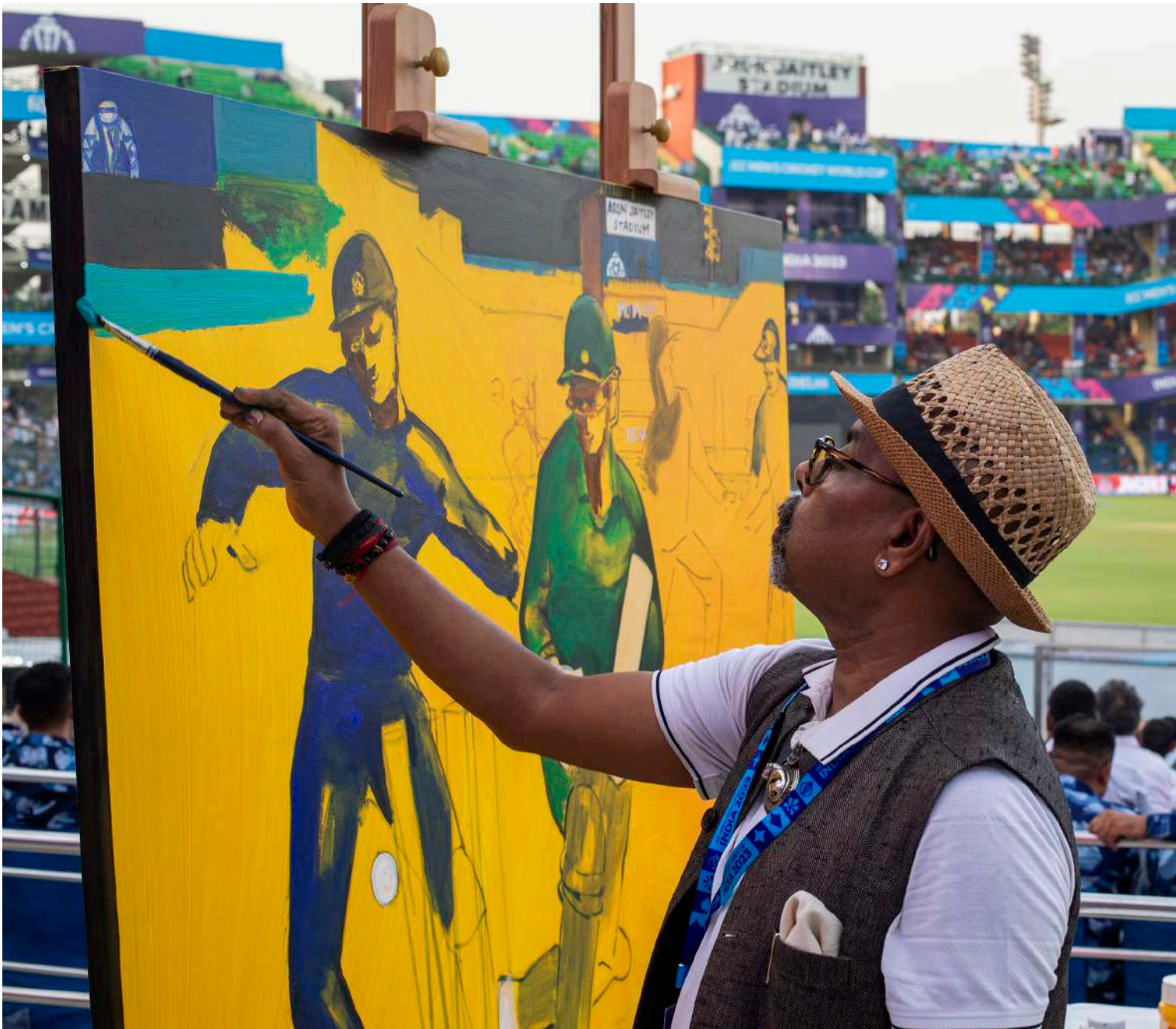
I'm lazy and can happily do nothing for hours.

Fictional Landscapes, a groundbreaking exhibition, recently showcased the works of 28 women artists, including Taisia Korotkova's work, across five galleries in Dubai at Foundry Downtown Dubai.



DARK FOREST SERIES (2017– 2022)

What could happen if humans use high technologies in the wrong way? My project, Dark Forest, is dedicated to a Russian “stalkers” subculture: to the people who romanticize and explore abandoned military zones. They have numerous blogs about their adventures, which sound like contemporary fairy tales. I decided to find out how the echo of the prehistoric rites contained in the traditional fairy tale penetrated contemporary life. Is there a connection between modern militarism and the rituals of a primitive culture? In my drawing, military objects built during the Cold War and after are seen throughout the forest. They remind me of ancient ritual architecture. The forest unites different kinds of plants, which can grow together only after an ecological disaster. I use black markers, considering the manner of fairy tale book illustrations. The foundation for my drawing is the backside of an oilcloth, a modern synonym for traditional home textile. Using this material, I remember the critical role of women as fairy tale keepers, storytellers, and, in the past, ancient leaders of the passage rites. The project consists of big-scale drawings on tablecloths, installations, and found objects, as well as smaller drawings on tablecloths.



LIVE: THE MAN WHO PAINTED THE ICC WORLD CUP 2023!

The exhibition features renowned artist Paresh Maity's live-action paintings of five pivotal matches from the 2023 ICC Men's World Cup, where his brush captured the unfolding drama and passion of the games in real-time. Adding to their historical significance, the winning captains personally signed the live canvases, elevating these artworks to vivid visual treasures and cherished memorabilia.

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Celebrating the intersection of sport and creativity, Dubai is hosting a unique art exhibition titled Cricket's Greatest Canvas; it marks the first solo exhibition in Dubai for renowned artist Paresh Maity, capturing the passion and spirit of cricket through his masterful works. Presented by Art be a Part, in collaboration with the International Cricket Council (ICC) and Gameplan, the exhibition showcases 12 original works inspired by the 2023 ICC Men's World Cup. The exhibition opened on January 16 for the viewers and will run until 1 March 2025 at Taj Dubai, Business Bay, Dubai.

It features Maity's live-action paintings of five pivotal matches from the 2023 ICC Men's World Cup, where his brush captured the unfolding drama and passion of the games in real-time. Each tournament venue is immortalized in his works, with the final match, rich in a kaleidoscope of emotions, forming the centerpiece of this extraordinary collection. Adding to their historical significance, the winning captains personally signed the live canvases, elevating these artworks to vivid visual treasures and cherished memorabilia. This collection of artworks is characterized by its vibrant colors and dynamic compositions, with each piece echoing the exuberance and intensity of cricket. From thrilling victories to heartfelt defeats, Maity's work chronicles the emotional highs and lows of the game, seamlessly blending the energy of sport with the beauty of art.

Paresh Maity, born in Tamluk near Kolkata in 1965, is a celebrated artist renowned for his mastery of diverse mediums, including watercolor, oil, acrylic painting, sculpture, and photography. Over nearly four decades, he has held 88 solo exhibitions and significantly contributed to the global art scene. His works are in prestigious collections, including Rashtrapati Bhavan, the British Museum, and the National Gallery of Modern Art. Maity has been honored with numerous accolades, including the Padma Shri from the Government of India and a Doctor of Literature (D.Litt.) degree from Sir Padampat Singhania University. Notably, in 2010, he created one of the world's longest murals for Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi.

Maity said, "Cricket is not just a sport; it is a celebration of life and unity. Painting the World Cup was an unforgettable experience, where every brushstroke captured the game's energy, joy, and emotion. This exhibition is my tribute to the moments that brought people together and to the unyielding spirit of cricket."



"Cricket's Greatest Canvas - X". Afaganistan- South Africa , Ahemdabad , Size -4 ft x 5 ft, Oil Acrylic On Canvas. 2023

Excerpts from an interaction with the artist.

What inspired you to blend this sport with your distinctive artistic style?

Cricket has always inspired me; this sport's unity, spirit, and energy inspired me to bridge the gap between art and sport. Previously, I have blended music and art many times, collaborating with artists such as Amjad Ali Khan and painting with music in the backdrop of Goa's landscape, among other initiatives. This unique series of paintings was born out of my regard for cricket as a sport, and the energy of unity that it harbors really blended with my artistic style.

Can you walk us through your creative process when painting such fast-paced, real-time moments? What challenges did you face in capturing the energy of the games?

It is indeed a challenge to recreate the game's energy in one canvas within a short time. When you capture the essence, spirit, energy, unity, and excitement of the game in real-time moments, it is a thrilling experience. I have been painting outside for more than four decades, capturing the energies of Venice, Benaras, France, or any place I travel to. When I start painting, I get completely immersed in my art. I don't know who is next to me, and the painting process is like my meditation. Capturing these live matches was also like that; I became oblivious to the surroundings and was engrossed in my art. The challenge of capturing so much life was difficult, but it was also a thrilling and unique experience as I could feel the energy of the sport around me.

How did your experience of watching the 2023 ICC Men's World Cup impact your approach to these paintings? Were there any specific moments that particularly stood out to you?

Cricket is a very challenging and exciting game with nearly millions of viewers. When you are in the moment, capturing crucial moments of the game, like someone hitting a sixer or someone getting out, it is a very unique experience. There aren't any specific moments per se, but the whole experience was exhilarating and challenging at the same time.

Can you tell us more about the significance of the

signed canvases by the winning captains? How did this element elevate the meaning of the artwork for you?

This whole event was a one-of-a-kind, lifetime experience to capture the 2023 World Cup in India. It was like capturing a moment of unity and togetherness fueled by emotion. It was extraordinary when the winning captains came to sign the canvases; it was a rare occurrence in art and sports. For me, it was a true union of my art with the dynamic world of sports and, thus, was very special to witness.

The final match features a kaleidoscope of emotions – what was the emotional connection you felt while working on this piece, and how did it differ from the others?

Indeed, the final match is always the most emotional, full of anticipation, excitement, and tension. The painting I created during the World Cup finale was the best one. My mind was full of emotion; there was crying and frustration, but I felt I could capture the moment, a unique and memorable experience.

With its energy and flow, how is cricket an ideal subject for your art?

My first cricket experience was in 1983 when the World Cup happened, and India was winning under the captainship of Kapil Dev. I remember we had this small television in my native village of Tamluk. We were all gathered at that moment; the emotional feeling and joy of winning the World Cup were immense. I admired Kapil Dev and have always wanted to do something with cricket and art.

How do you think the combination of sports and art enhances the game's narrative for the viewer?

Combining art and cricket creates a new narrative, bridging the gap between sports and art. Witnessing how two distinct concepts come together: their broad histories and energies is exciting. They all combine to create a fantastic new idea that intrigues the viewer and heightens their excitement.

As a Padma Shri awardee and internationally acclaimed artist, you've had a long and varied career. What about cricket made you want to dedicate this exhibition to the sport?

I have always believed that artists should not have any barriers and should transform anything and



"VIJAYPATH" XII. Size - 58 x 48, Oil, Acrylic On Canvas. 2024



"Cricket's Greatest Canvas - F". South Africa - Sri Lanka, New Delhi, Size - 4 ft x 6 ft, Oil Acrylic On Canvas. 2023



"Cricket's Greatest Canvas - XI". India - Australia, Ahmedabad, Size - 4 ft x 5 ft, Oil Acrylic On Canvas. 2023



©Vicky Luthra

everything into a piece of art. As a young student, I was always fascinated by capturing the force and the movement of animals, especially horses. Cricket has a similar quality — especially the force and raw energy behind the game. That has inspired me to dedicate this exhibition to cricket.

What do you hope viewers will take away from this exhibition?

I hope the viewers enjoy this exhibition, as it brings a new dimension to my art. People who come to my exhibitions already have a preconceived notion about my work. While they appreciate and enjoy my art, this exhibition completely differs from my usual oeuvre. Cricket is perceived as a sport and a religion in India. I hope the viewers will enjoy the different themes, emotions, and actions I have captured in this work and feel that the spirit of cricket is rooted in unity and passion.

Why did you collaborate with Art Be A Part to bring this exhibition to Dubai?

ICC and Gameplan collaborated with me; as you know, the ICC is headquartered in Dubai. I wanted everyone to enjoy this exhibition, which will be on view for over a month to reach a wider audience. Many places were available, but the dates

were not available. When I learned about Art Be a Part, its social work and philanthropic initiatives immediately took me. My vision as an individual aligned with their vision, and I was convinced that this collaboration was meant to be. I wish them all the best for the exhibition, and I hope everyone enjoys the series.

Presented by Art be a Part, in collaboration with the International Cricket Council (ICC) and Gameplan, the exhibition showcases 12 original works inspired by the 2023 ICC Men's World Cup. The exhibition opened on January 16 for the viewers and will run until 1 March 2025 at Taj Dubai, Business Bay, Dubai.

PIUMIA

by CIRQUE DU LIBAN



THE NEW-AGE CIRCUS

The traditional or modern circus is a celebration of artistry, innovation, and resilience. For audiences and performers, the circus remains a source of wonder, proving that the magic of live entertainment will never fade.



The traditional circus has always held a place in the entertainment world – with big top tents, animal acts, and ringmasters; it has always captivated audiences. Yet, as with everything else, the circus has come a long way.

Once defined by classic comedic routines and animal acts, the circus has given way to something far more innovative and inspiring. Nowadays, circus entertainment focuses on human talent, emphasizing the unparalleled and infinite skills that a human

body can achieve. Displays of the human ability by aerialists, acrobats, and tightrope walkers remind us of our true potential and inspire audiences.

The heart of a circus is to curate acts that amaze audiences, and in these modern times the transition from traditional circuses to contemporary performances was inevitable. Especially when many circuses decided to retire animal acts altogether, they paved the way for a new era of creativity.

In their place came a focus on human talent –



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acrobatics, juggling, aerial skills, and more. We are now seeing a new movement in the circus community that revolves around human expression and storytelling. For example, PLUMA introduces you to the captivating story of a young girl with dreams of flying. Storytelling allows performers to connect with audiences on a deeper level.

Contemporary circus is now closer to a theatrical production showcasing awe-inspiring talents and tricks. This offers a pathway for young talents to hone their skills and enter the entertainment industry. With today's new-age technology, the learning process is streamlined and enhances safety measures for performers. This evolution has also allowed the circus to reach new audiences and young minds – something impossible before. Pop culture influences, such as themes inspired by music, films, and books, make the performances more relatable to younger generations.

As the circus continues to evolve, its future looks bright. The emphasis on human talent ensures that it remains a relevant and meaningful form of entertainment that resonates with audiences of all ages. By embracing innovation and ethical practices, the circus has positioned itself as a beacon of creativity and inspiration in the modern world.

Recently, the number of significant shows showcased worldwide is continuously rising. Thanks to the power of the internet and a dedicated community, there is now an increasing awareness of the contemporary circus and its power as an elevated art form.

The traditional or modern circus is a celebration of artistry, innovation, and resilience. For audiences and performers, the circus remains a source of wonder, proving that the magic of live entertainment will never fade.

PLUMA Circus is coming to Yas Island, Abu Dhabi, in March 2025 with even bigger stunts, upgraded thrills, and a fresh take on the magic of circus entertainment! This extraordinary event promises breathtaking new performances, cutting-edge 3D projections, and non-stop fun for families and thrill-seekers alike. Thierry Antonios, Managing Director, at Entertainment contributes an exclusive on how the concept of "the circus" has become more diverse, combining street performances, immersive theater, and even pop-culture influences to reach modern audiences.





ADVENTURE, HERE WE COME!

As an artiste of words (journalist and author), I can never emphasize enough on leaving the empty notebook and Word document behind for some time off in nature. So, here we were, securing our wristbands and water bottles at the Adventure Cafe to explore more than a handful of activities, including water sports, mountain biking, fitness classes, yoga sessions, horse riding, stargazing, and survival skills courses.

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It's easier to be brave when you're not alone. This was my underlying thought as I hiked up a trail in the Kalba Mountains, Sharjah, UAE. I not only felt brave, but I'd say braver; for giving us company were Omkar and Robin, the expert hiking crew. The two-hour (uphill, downhill) trek dotted with rocks and sand seemed within limits, for the duo remained calm, patient, and friendly as they guided us on day one of the Adventure Festival. It was 11 am when we made it back to the base. The experience had overwhelmed us — so much so that instead of camping for the 'art workshop' next, we decided to take the shuttle from the Mountain Camp to the Water Sports Centre and try our hands on kayaking for the first time.

But before getting our clothes wet and testing our arm strength, let's rewind. We said goodbye to Dubai (for a day) to fill our Saturday with a sense of calmness and a dash of adventure. At 7 am, we hit the road. If you wish to create art, you must travel unknown roads, right? As an artiste of words (journalist and author), I can never emphasize enough on leaving the empty notebook and Word document behind for some time off in nature. So, here we were, securing our wristbands and water bottles at the Adventure Cafe to explore more than a handful of activities, including water sports, mountain biking, fitness classes, yoga sessions, horse riding, stargazing, and survival skills courses.

Since the sun was not harsh when we reached, we chose to hike foremost. I'd be lying if I were to say the 'kid-friendly' labeled hike was friendly enough for me. The hiking crew did say it was not, so organizers, please note this for the future. Nevertheless, going slow and the crew's perfect attitude helped us test our limitations! So, kudos lie there. City dwellers often crave earnest conversations and warmer smiles, and the crew at the Festival filled



that need and greed. Just walking around in the Mountain Camp, watching the children attend Rope Courses, adults sitting in for a yoga class, or simply sitting on the rocks, which were tastefully adorned with cushions that screamed Majlis patterns and colors, is just what we needed to slow down at the end of the year. And, of course, the chance to learn about the Mangroves in the region was also on the cards. The one-hour Mangrove Walk turned out to be more of a short stroll, followed by a let's use fish nets to catch a crab, a fish, and more — I did wish it was more informative and included a visit to the Khor Kalba Mangrove Centre next door, but alas, it was not. Once again, the crew's enthusiasm made up for the lack of what could have been a fuller experience. The fuller experience for us came in the form of the Guided Kayak Tour, which was a blend of serenity and escapade. After we were slipped into life jackets, instructions were given on 'how to operate,' and well, we were in the waters, kayaking our way to a newer skill, experience. Synchronization and balance are what could guide you here and in life, I'd say.

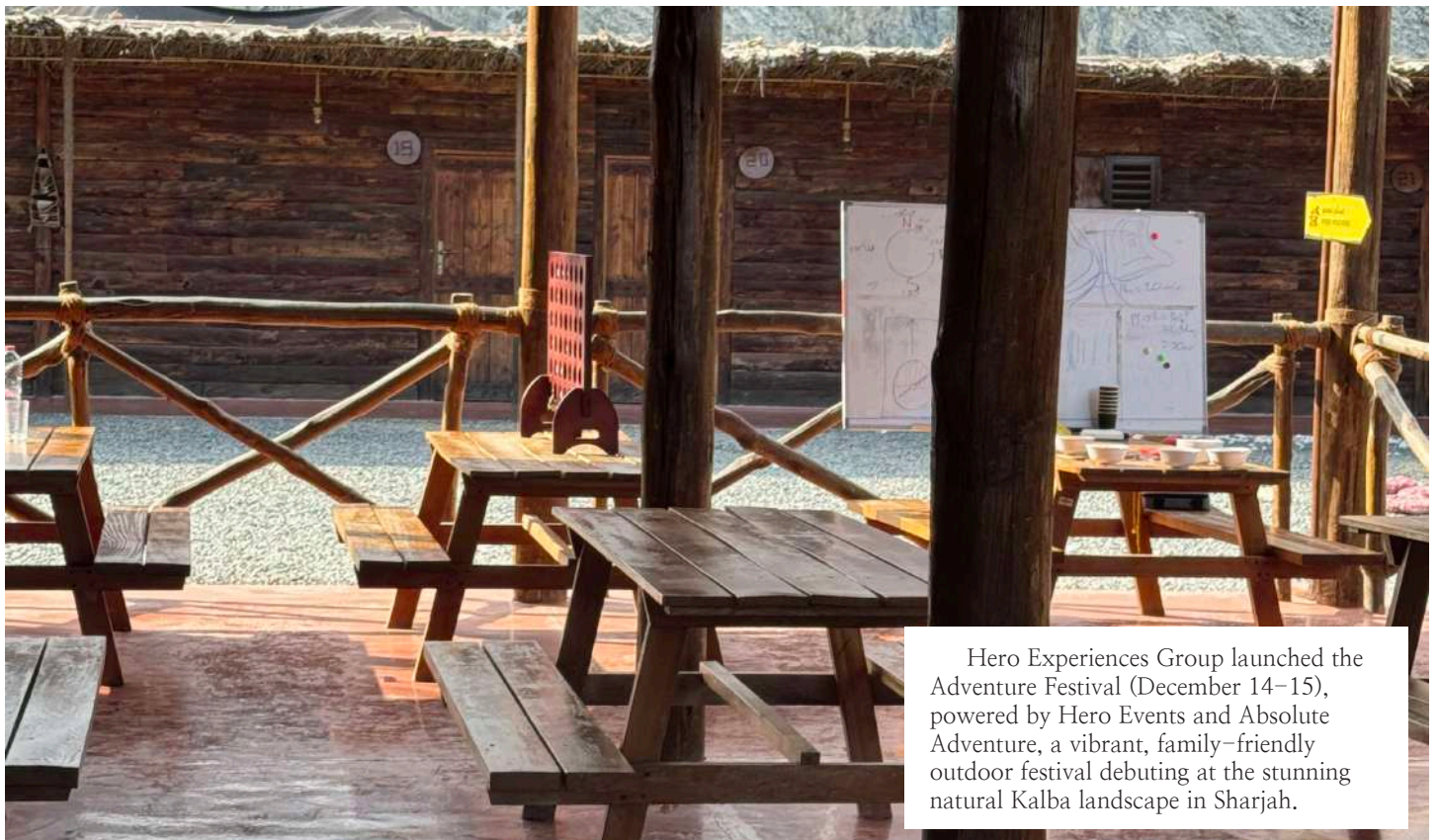
Pardon the cliché, but there was something for everyone at the camp, and it did make for a good day out in the mountains with friends and family. Barring the fact that where was everyone? We were not expecting huge crowds; the quiet was what we sought, but it was quieter than we had thought. We had our bags in tow, with a change of clothes and

a toothbrush, but we took a U-Turn and returned home to Dubai partly for a few reasons. We didn't spot many campers staying overnight, perhaps because it was day one of the camp and season. Also, we were a tad disappointed with the food choices — we'd expected a limited menu, which is perfect for a camp like this, but the quality and choices were way off the mark. Additionally, the staff at the dining area was pretty lost at operations, and we did discount that as well, for it is their debut in the region.

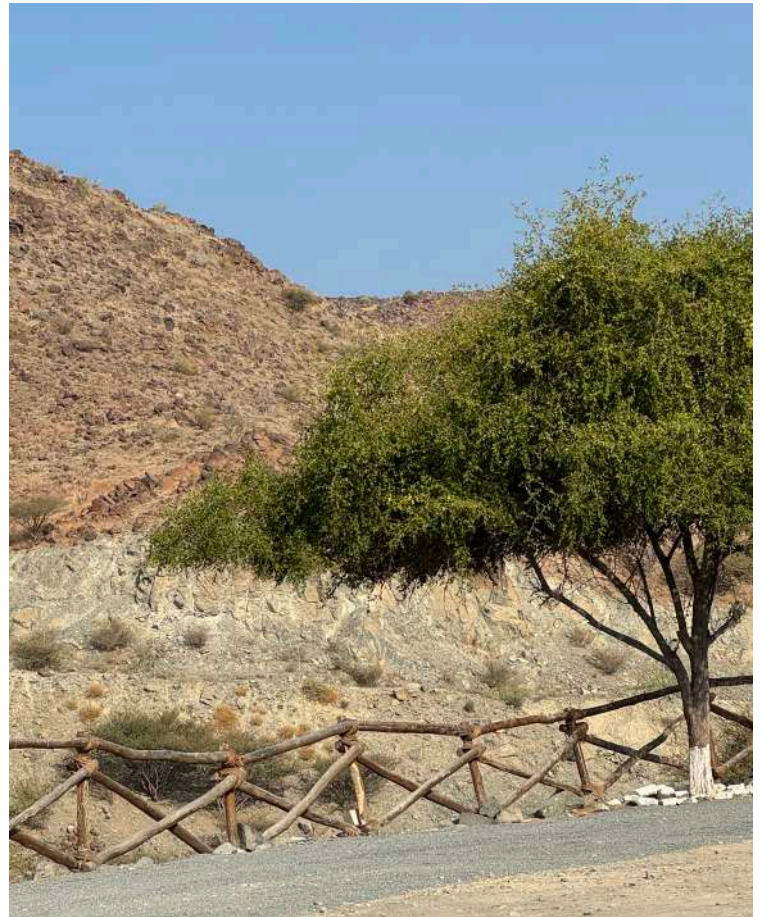
Yes, the organizers have thought through everything, and while they seem prepared, I guess the implementation would take a bit to translate from paper to mountains. Would we like to go back and perhaps even stay? A big yes, for who'd not want to sit by the bonfire with a book and hot chocolate? So, adventure, we shall return!



Purva Grover is an author, journalist, and creative entrepreneur. She is the founder-editor of storiesoverart.com, a sanctuary for all who find solace, inspiration, and purpose in art. In a world that often overlooks the significance of art, she stands firm in her belief that it is essential, more so than anything else.



Hero Experiences Group launched the Adventure Festival (December 14–15), powered by Hero Events and Absolute Adventure, a vibrant, family-friendly outdoor festival debuting at the stunning natural Kalba landscape in Sharjah.





ECHOES OF POWER AND PASSION: THE JOURNEY OF MEN'S RINGS

These themes: History, Gothic, Christian Mysticism, Vanitas, and Eclecticism — transform Yves Gastou's collection into a poetic journey through time, belief, and human expression. Each ring is a narrative, a fragment of the lives and histories it has touched. As we look upon Gastou's life's work, we are invited to see rings not just as objects but as artifacts of human experience, as symbols that carry the weight of identity, culture, and passion. In these meticulously curated pieces, Gastou's legacy lives on, a testament to his vision and the enduring, intimate power of men's rings to speak, remember, and transform.

From ancient times to today, men's rings have been more than mere ornamentation; they are vessels of history, bearers of beliefs, and transformation markers. These small circles of metal — sometimes as simple as a gold band, sometimes crafted with an artistry that borders on the divine — have long carried the weight of human identity. Today, the meaning of men's rings stretches beyond adornment or status; they have become profound emblems of individuality, windows into personal mythologies, and silent confidants of those who wear them. The collection of men's rings assembled by Yves Gastou, collector and connoisseur, embodies this transformation.

Spanning over forty years and touching on historical and cultural diversity, Gastou's collection is an ode to the narrative power of jewelry. In his hands, these rings are categorized into five evocative themes—History, Gothic, Christian Mysticism, Vanitas, and Eclecticism — each revealing a distinct facet of the human journey through art and symbolism. Together, they invite us to look closely, to feel the stories inscribed using different materials, and to appreciate the rich legacy of this intimate art form.

Historically speaking, the rings embody authority, nobility, and the continuity of lineage. From the ancient worlds of Mesopotamia and Egypt to the grandeur of classical Greece, rings have symbolized power and connection to the divine. By the 18th century, the practice of European aristocrats embarking on the Grand Tour elevated rings to new heights of cultural significance. While traveling through Italy and Greece, young noblemen returned home adorned with rings bearing intaglios and cameos, miniature depictions of deities like Athena, or mythic figures such as Medusa. These rings embodied the wearer's classical education and intellectual sophistication, their designs mirroring the Enlightenment's fascination with antiquity. A piece in Gastou's collection featuring Napoleon's profile is a vivid reminder of the era's reverence

for neoclassical ideals and revolutionary fervor. Such rings capture more than diverse journeys; they enshrine a worldview that shaped Europe's cultural landscape, merging heritage with identity.

Evoking the medieval past

The Gothic theme brings us into a darker, more mystical realm, where rings conjure images of chivalric knights, shadowed cathedrals, and the haunting beauty of medieval spirituality. Inspired by Europe's Romantic rediscovery of the Middle Ages, Gastou's Gothic rings evoke a fascination with mysticism, where gargoyles, swords, and heraldic crests intertwine. This theme, deeply rooted in the 19th-century Romantic movement, reflects a period when artists and writers like Victor Hugo and Walter Scott looked to the medieval past with reverence and intrigue, reviving its symbols and aesthetics as expressions of mystery and drama. The Romantic era's embrace of the mysterious and the macabre captures the allure of an imagined past. In this world, virtue and sin collide in grand, shadowy narratives that captivated audiences of the time. A centerpiece of Gastou's Gothic collection is Lydia Courteille's Crusades-inspired ring, a contemporary French designer's nod to this medieval revival. Its amethyst stone reflects the richness and turbulence of medieval life, embodying Gothic art's emotional and symbolic power. Gothic rings are more than jewelry; they are portals to a time when faith and fear, light and darkness, danced in endless tension. These rings reflect Gastou's ability to channel historical nostalgia and an emotional depth that resonates with modern wearers, bridging the distant past with present-day fascination.

Transcending spiritual introspection

Within the theme of Christian Mysticism, rings reveal a devotion that transcends the material, becoming symbols of faith and spiritual introspection. For centuries, Christian rings were worn as physical expressions of belief, carrying icons of saints, crosses, and even fragments of



Bishop's ring, Mellerio dits Meller, c. 1890, Gold and citrine, Men's Rings Exhibition, L'ÉCOLE Middle East

holy relics. The Crown of Thorns Ring by Philippe Niederländer in Gastou's collection captures this devotion exquisitely. Its miniature gold crown evokes Christ's suffering and sacrifice — a potent reminder of humanity's humility with the divine. Other ecclesiastical rings, like the 19th century Bishop's Ring by Mellerio dits Meller, feature citrine stones, their deep color hues mirroring the clerical robes and signifying piety and authority. Although purple is traditionally associated with penitential seasons such as Lent and Advent in Christian liturgy, the citrine in the Bishop's ring reflects a broader symbol of spiritual power rather than a direct link to these seasons. These rings, adorned with symbols from Christianity's rich visual language, act as adornments and silent prayers. For believers, they are tokens of devotion; for collectors like Gastou, they represent the profound history that has shaped Western civilizations. Christian mysticism in Gastou's hands is thus both a personal and cultural journey, a study of faith rendered in precious metals and gemstones.

Reflecting the appreciation for life

Vanitas rings, perhaps the most haunting of all, invite us to confront mortality with a foresight that is as artistic as it is philosophical. Originating since the dawn of civilization and re-imagined in the Renaissance period, vanitas motifs draw upon the concept of *memento mori*, or "remember you are going to die." These rings, often adorned with skulls,

bones, or coffins, offer not a morbid reflection but an invitation to live deeply and without illusion. Gastou's collection includes striking Vanitas pieces, such as André Lassen's Skull Ring, blends more modern biker culture elements with classical Vanitas iconography. Here, the skull is neither a threat nor a mere ornament — It is a challenge, a call to acknowledge life's fragility and beauty. For Gastou, vanitas rings were not simply macabre curiosities; they were profound statements, reminders that each moment is precious. This theme embodies a philosophical acceptance of life's impermanence, transforming dark reflections on morality into moments of sublime appreciation. With each ring, Gastou's Vanitas collection dares the wearer to embrace life fully, aware of its inevitable end yet unburdened by fear.

Expressions of symbols and beauty

The final theme, Eclecticism, captures Gastou's boundless curiosity and respect for artistic diversity. Eclectic rings are expressions of the collector's desire to transcend boundaries, exploring beauty through symbols and motifs that may appear unconventional or unfamiliar to a Western audience. Here, Gastou's collection includes rings inspired by African tribal art, American sports culture, and avant-garde designs that defy easy categorization. The Super Bowl replica ring, crafted as a faithful homage to American sports culture, sits alongside a Chief's Ring from Mali, designed by the Dogon people's rich traditions. Each piece within the Eclecticism theme is a testament to the universal language of art, reminding us that jewelry can be a bridge between cultures and a meeting point for tradition and innovation. Gastou's eclectic approach reflects a world where the beauty of a ring lies not only in its craftsmanship but in the stories it tells and the boundaries it crosses.



Dogon chef_s ring, 1965, Bronze, Men's Rings Exhibition, L'ÉCOLE Middle East



Prof. Dr. David Usieto Cabrera has over a decade of experience in the art world. He holds a PhD in Asian Art from JGU in Germany, where he focused on the Near East, working extensively in Saudi Arabia and Iraq. His expertise spans ancient cultures and their artistic expressions, a knowledge he has applied as a curator in major museums and galleries and projects across the Middle East. Currently, he is a Lecturer at L'ÉCOLE Middle East, School of Jewelry Arts, supported by Van Cleef & Arpels, where he teaches courses in art history. He contributes an exclusive exploring how men's rings have transcended their utilitarian or decorative purposes to become powerful symbols of identity, beliefs, and personal narratives, with a focus on how the five thematic pillars—History, Gothic, Christian Mysticism, Vanitas, and Eclecticism—reflect not only the cultural significance of rings across time but also the profoundly personal passion of the collector, who dedicated 40 years to curating this extraordinary collection.



Young Napoleon profile, c. 1890, Silver and carnelian, Men's Rings Exhibition, L'ÉCOLE MIDDLE EAST

THE CURIOUS CASE OF STAND-UP COMEDY IN DUBAI, UAE

A refreshing evening in collaboration with Comedy Kix, a comedy hub of Dubai, which has been nurturing comedic talent since 2019

Confession: it has been a while since we last watched a stand-up comedy show in the town, so let's say that we did feel our funny bones were a bit rusty and tad cynical when we walked in on a Sunday evening to Bay Club DoubleTree by Hilton Dubai, Business Bay, to watch the free comedy night, held in collaboration with Comedy Kix, a comedy hub of Dubai, nurturing comedic talent since 2019.

Rewind, there were many reasons we'd stopped showing up. The Problem of Plenty, a comedy evening every single day of the week at every other pub/lounge, has, over the years, brought the talent quotient at these nights a tad lower — how many laughs can you generate from the town, week after week? Not many, which led to the comedians performing the same sets every alternate night as they pub-hopped. You can't create fresh content each night; it is impossible and futile. Have we evolved to an era where people would buy tickets for a night? Not yet, so the idea remains to sell talent in the garb of free, discounted drinks and more. How will that change? Only if we applaud at our end, and the performers pull up the socks at theirs.

Before anyone gets offended, just like they offer a warning at comedy nights: Of course, we have never been on the stage attempting to do this challenging job, so we greatly respect those who do it, night after night.

Back to the Sunday night, this one was refreshing; the tiny audience in attendance was perfect, for it didn't overwhelm the audience nor the comedians, as a few tried their jokes. We didn't mind being guinea pigs to their fresh-off notebooks and mobile jokes or being spotlighted. It takes a village to raise not just a child but a comedian, and we here at *stories over art* are for all that!

Tudor, who has spent six months in the UAE, is already on stage and deserves to be

applauded. He did mention he performed back home, but it takes many to figure out du connections and Salik routes in six months, and here he was on stage! Faizan made us laugh with his oh-so-humble, self-deprecating humor; the jokes may be old, about budgets, dating issues, and more, but his delivery and unique touch to each stereotype was refreshing. Z' content was sharp, well-researched, and refreshing. He relied on his bald self and did draw in many chuckles! Moncef was impressive with his engagement style, Spanish and French attempts, and wore casual very well. Polina picked up a fun thread of thoughts but didn't deliver many punches, but kudos to her for a pleasant attempt! As the evening host, Amr said, "It takes a lot of courage to be on the stage, foremost. Second, imagine trying to make a bunch of strangers laugh."

Amr kept us entertained. How do you be good at crowd work, even with a handful to target? This funny Egyptian knows that! The show ended with the senior performer. Can we call Imah Dumaghay that now? She, too, relied on a few old jokes to introduce herself — her Filipino self — which we didn't mind and laughed along. She is always easy to watch and doesn't complicate comedy too much, which we like. Also, it was lovely how each performer incorporated what the

previous performers said/did in their acts; watching the impromptu sense of humor at work was excellent!

Will we return? Oh yes! And yes, while we have accepted that nothing can start on time in the town, they did start 40 minutes later (Showtime:8pm), but it would be great to resolve in 2025 to start on time, respect the punctual, and let the latecomers deal with FOMO? The venue is doing a decent job utilizing its pool area to get in some sales and guests over the good winter months. Still, they could create a better experience by enhancing the aesthetics and expanding the menu to get people to stay in for a little longer. We enjoyed our meal of nachos, shrimp, and pizzas, and the service was superb; the food was average. The portion sizes and value for money are a plus as well. A few cosmetic changes to the venue and extra garnish would only add to the already pleasant atmosphere!

Until next time, to laughs and flavors.



Purva Grover is an author, journalist, and creative entrepreneur. She is the founder-editor of *storiesoverart.com*, a sanctuary for all who find solace, inspiration, and purpose in art. In a world that often overlooks the significance of art, she stands firm in her belief that it is essential, more so than anything else.



WORKSHOP

Wardrobe of Words, a creative writing journey, author, editor, and creative entrepreneur Purva Grover invites participants to explore their minds through writing, using thoughts as outfits to dress narratives that bring clarity and healing. This workshop aspires to foster self-discovery and therapeutic expression in a supportive environment through guided exercises and interactive activities. The workshop will be held on February 9, 11 am, at Baraha, as part of the 13th edition of the Ras Al Khaimah Art Festival, taking place at Al Jazeera Al Hamra Heritage Village (31 January to 28 February 2025). The Festival celebrates the intricate beauty of 'memory' as its theme. Find out more and reserve a seat by visiting rakart.ae.

stories over art

middle east & beyond

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Street art is visual art created in public locations for public visibility. Where in Dubai have you witnessed street art that you've loved and why? Send your responses to hello@storiesoverart.com with the subject line "Street and Arts."

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