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From Francisco de Zurbarán to Jackson Pollock, painters are a continuing source of inspiration for today's designers. But the association between art and clothing is an age-old story of fascination, dating back to medieval times



SUPERSTOCK

Art & Fashion

A Fine ROMANCE

ART IS ART AND FASHION IS AN industry. Forget for a moment the multimillion-dollar auction market, the network of international dealers, the thousands of people—from museum guards to art book publishers—whose livelihoods depend on the creation, sale, and dissemination of art. There is a long-standing, genteel tradition—an ideal, at least—that art is the creation of individuals burning bright with lofty inspiration, that art is above commerce, that art, for its own sake or for any other reason, is the big, important thing. That's why we refer to the art world and not, more cynically, the art industry. Whereas fashion, or the rag trade, as it is affectionately called, comes with no such

BY MICHAEL BOOD

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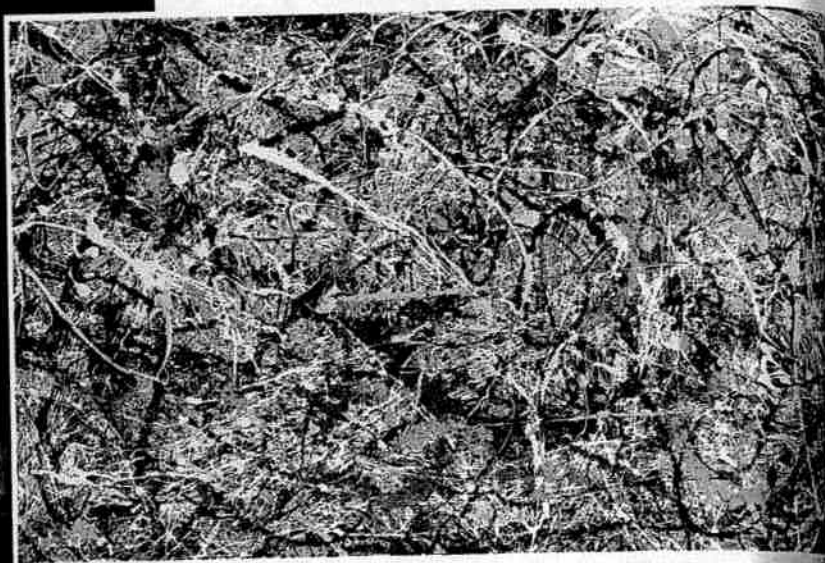
GUY MARINEAU/AGENCE TOP

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GUY MARINEAU/AGENCE TOP



unimportant, except to a few hundred of its more addicted followers, thousands of people who make their living from it and millions more who just like to shop.

And never the twain shall meet. Except that they do. In fact the association between art and fashion is a long one and only growing more intense. The depiction of elaborate clothes, rich embroideries, subtle colors, and shimmering sumptuous fabrics has been an irresistible challenge and a joy for painters since the days of anonymous medieval manuscript illuminators. Holbein and Pisanello, Goya and Velázquez, Watteau and Ingres all expressed the high status and wealth of their sitters, as well as their own bravura techniques, in paintings that create brilliant illusions of silks and velvets and satins. Where would Gainsborough's "Blue Boy" be without his blue suit? One of the most famous, and scandalous, dresses ever depicted in paint is the black velvet, low-cut gown worn by *Madame X* (Mme Gautreau) when she was portrayed by John Singer Sargent in 1884. That dress is still inspiring designers such as Carolynne Roehm, who says that she

continues to refer back to the painting when she thinks about the ever-popular little black dress.

Of course, painters have occasionally gone beyond merely recording what was worn in front of them. Gustav Klimt's portraits of women, with their "signed" dresses that are more prominent than his subjects' faces—as we see in perhaps his most famous image, *The Kiss* of 1907–08, with its gold pattern interspersed with colorful renderings of flowers and fish. It is certainly beside the point that Klimt was a dress designer.

Fashion has been unabashed at using art for its purposes. Mariano Fortuny

Michael Boodro is a senior editor at *Vogue*.

ABOVE Jean-Paul Gaultier has picked up on the splash-and-drip paintings of Jackson Pollock, transferring them to a business-like canvas of chalk stripes for women's suits. **INSET** The original: Pollock's *The Number 3*, 1949.



INSET Henri Matisse's *La blouse Romaine* (The Romanian Blouse), 1940. **RIGHT** The elaborately embellished blouse worn by Matisse's model made its way into one of Yves Saint Laurent's elegant designs.

MUSEE NATIONAL D'ART MODERNE, PARIS



Early-20th-century Italian designer, created flowing, dresses in silk that freely called up the elegant lines of classical Greek statuary. And the pull of art as a fashion force is equally strong in our own time. After his couture debut last year, Yves Saint Laurent told the press that he was influenced by the palette of Botticelli. Valentino has borrowed black-and-white geometric motifs from the Viennese artists Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser and incorporated them in sequins on dresses. Gianni Versace, too, has looked to the Secessionists as a source some years ago. Lately, instead of short dresses, he evoked the colorful geometry of Sonia Delaunay's watercolors, and an Eiffel Tower he has done in sequins, was worthy of her husband, Paul's paintings. (Sonia Delaunay designed dresses and jewelry for herself.) Meanwhile, Karl Lagerfeld's couture collection for Chanel re-created the tight Empire bust line and the Grecian folds seen in Jacques-Louis David's famous portrait of *Madame Recamier* (ca. 1800), while Christian

Lacroix has taken a Spanish cue from retrospectives of Goya and Velázquez—replicating the voluminous folds of the dress in Zurbarán's *Saint Elizabeth of Portugal* (ca. 1630–35).

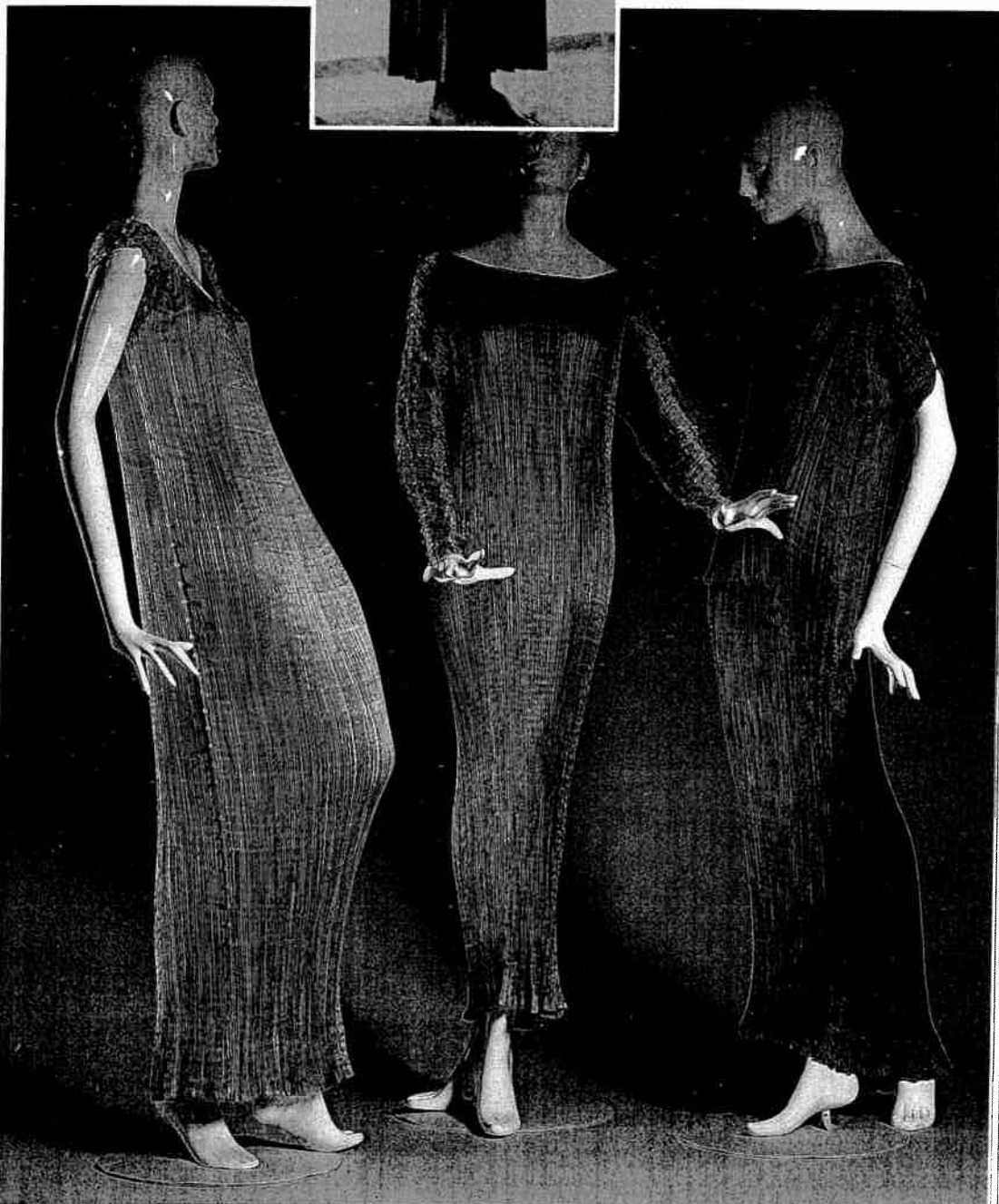
Today's designers don't only look to works of art. Increasingly they are turning to photography and to the art scene to give their clothes the cachet for their enterprising clients. Avant-garde Japanese designer Rei Kawakubo has used photographs of painter Francesco Clemente and of photographers Doug and Mike Smith to advertise her Comme des Garçons line. (The Clemente portrait in turn appeared on the cover of a European art magazine.) Young artist Izhar Patkin, who showed his sculpture *Don Quijote, Segunda Parte* in New York at the Holly Solomon Gallery and in this summer's Venice Biennale, had an exhibition of the same work in Milan, not at a gallery but at the lavish retail complex of designer Romeo Gigli, with whom he has created fabric patterns. One of Calvin Klein's most famous ad campaigns, photographed by Bruce Weber in 1984, was set not in and around the ranch of Georgia O'Keeffe in the Arizona desert; O'Keeffe even allowed herself to be photographed as part of the series of black-and-white images.

Of course, in an industry noted for that sincerest form of flattery, the practice of knocking off, as it's known in the busi-

DELPHI MUSEUM PHOTO PERCHERON



BELOW A set of evening dresses by Mariano Fortuny from the early 1950s (left), ca. 1910–35 (center), and the 1930s (right). Fashion has long used art for its own purposes; Fortuny's beaded silk dresses freely call up the elegant lines and folds of Greek statuary, such as those of *The Delphi Charioteer* (inset), a bronze figure from ca. 475 bc.



COURTESY THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, THE COSTUME INSTITUTE

ness, it's not surprising that designers should turn to art for ideas. But the art and fashion connection is more complex than mere thievery and inspiration. Because of the transitory nature of clothing styles and the speed with which fashion absorbs whatever is new (an innovation shown on runways in October can be on the streets by December), fashion often reflects or even predicts a common mood or desire, a yearning for change, a nostalgia for a more glorious past, a need for a new and improved future.

Surely it was not coincidental that the 1960s' sleek, futuristic miniskirt sheaths and white vinyl go-go boots of Courrèges and Pierre Cardin, the metal-disc dresses of Paco Rabanne, and the extreme, geometric hairstyles of Vidal Sassoon all came to the fore at the same time that kinetic art, Pop art, Op art, and hard-edge geometric abstract painting were the rage, when the Apollo spacecrafts were orbiting the globe and technology seemed to promise exciting new advances for art as well as for society.

It was certainly not happenstance that in the mid-1980s Christian Lacroix made his sensational debut as a couturier with concoctions of pouf skirts of satin and brocaded velvets at the same time that there were major touring retrospectives of the 18th-century painters Boucher and Fragonard, who presented sensuality as a froth of ruffles and ribbons. As Paul Audrain, chairman of the house of Lacroix, stated at the launching of the first new couture line in 25 years: "New social and cultural trends have put the values of the 1970s into reverse. Ten years ago, any kind of personal expression was at a low point. All that has changed. People with new money want to express their success and there was no new couturier to capitalize on this particular trend." The impulse that caused the fashion press to swoon and led thousands of women to temporarily abandon severe, modern black for frills and bustles in the midst of the Reagan era was similar to the spirit of the times that Boucher fancifully documented in his canvases done during the height of the French monarchy.

The inspiration and motivations of both artists and clothing designers can be strikingly similar. At the same time that such artists as Sherrie Levine, Mike Bidlo, and Richard Prince became famous for appropriating and re-presenting icons of the modernist canon, ranging from photographs by Walker Evans



ABOVE Designer Bill Blass, who for his 1988 collection re-created a Matisse interior as a design for the back of a jacket (below). Designer homages such as this affirm a century-old sentiment that in using art, they are not denigrating but celebrating it.



to the paintings of Jackson Pollock, the more adventurous fashion designers, including Karl Lagerfeld, Franco Moschino, and Patrick Kelly, were doing precisely the same to the modern fashion icon, the Chanel suit. By shearing its skirt to miniproportions, inverting its pockets, attaching big bright plastic buttons, and draping it with enough chains to make it comical, fashion proved that it too could appropriate its own past—not only mocking a classic but showing its continuing versatility and relevance.

We owe a debt to painters for preserving fashion whole in their pictures. But the time came toward the end of the 19th century when all of that changed: photography became a widespread medium and fashion photography was born. Ironically, just when photography usurped the role of painting in documenting clothing, clothing came to play a different role in art. The Impressionists, with their break from the approved, classical subject matter of the academy and their radical concern with the everyday events of the middle class, portrayed passersby and gallerygoers, hat shoppers and picnickers, giving unprecedented importance to ordinary clothes, and a shock of recognition to viewers.

Claude Monet's 1866–67 *Women in the Garden*, Eduard Manet's *Reading* (1868), and Pierre-Auguste Renoir's 1876 *The Swing* all show the artists' delight in portraying simple white summer frocks in shimmering daylight. Gustave Caillebotte's *Paris; A Rainy Day*, of 1876–77, with its umbrellas and black-suited men, was as surprising for its straightforward realism as for its tilted ground plane and looming foreground figures. The clothes, and therefore the lives, depicted in these canvases were not so different from the viewer's own, and that meant art was no longer a rarefied, removed, or spiritual pursuit. Seeing their skirts and jackets, top hats and waistcoats must have been nearly striking to contemporaries.

givers as it would have been to see faces staring back at them from the

what this meant as time passed was everyday clothes and the people who them became an acceptable and un- ing subject. Fashion's practice of rap- changing clothing styles became a market phenomenon by the beginning century, and photography only multi- the effect of fashion as a universal nce in which everyone took part— umble or grand. Shock, in fact, was ed by allure in fashion images.

any great photographers have worked nion, including such undisputed mas- Edward Steichen, André Kertész, Ray, Diane Arbus, Richard Avedon, Irving Penn. (A retrospective of Man s fashion photographs goes on view month at the International Center for ography's midtown gallery space in New York.) It's a sign of the art world's ore conservative side, however, that their nion work has almost always been con- sidered by the critics as secondary to their art photography, as if these images—no matter how elegant or innovative—were ever tainted by commerce.

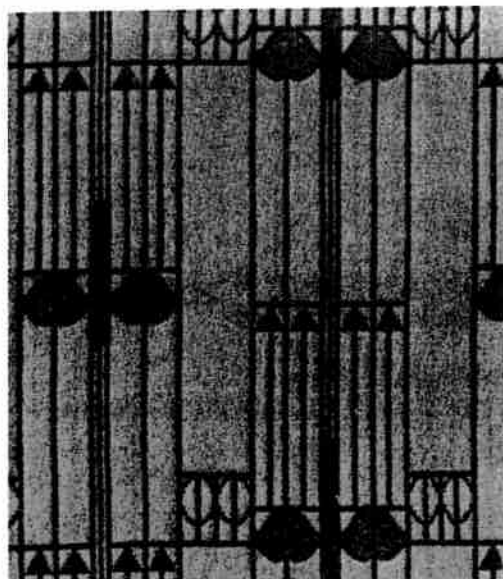
COURTESY VALENTINO



When the focus of modern art shifted from realism to abstraction around 1910, with the birth of Cubism, the illustration of clothing fell away as a commonplace subject. Still, artists were never content simply to record clothing designs, and there is a long history of artists becoming directly involved with fabrics, with cut and drapery. Matisse, finding himself dissatisfied with the current fashions in women's hats, created an old-style feathered bonnet for one of his most famous series, the 1919 "Plumed Hat" pencil drawings and the related painting *White Plumes* of the same year. And the artists of the Bauhaus, the Wiener Werkstätte, and Russian Constructivism, all working during the early decades of this century, saw clothing and textile design as part of their utopian projects to create a new society with a new esthetic order. Geometric forms, as symbols of preeminent human rationality, figured as a main element in many of their designs.

Yet perhaps the most intimate connection between art and fashion occurred during the heyday of Surrealism, when rationality was decidedly not the point. Part of the success of this movement's flirtation with fashion was no doubt due to the fact that it had no broad agenda and made no effort to awaken or elevate mass taste. Surrealist fashion was created in a spirit of fun, to amuse, to shock—and like so much else invented by

RIGHT A detail of "Notschrei" fabric, ca. 1903, designed by the Vienna Secessionist master Josef Hoffmann. **ABOVE** Hoffmann via Valentino.



COLLECTION JULIUS HUMMEL, VIENNA

the Surrealists—to question the basis on which judgments about art are made.

The designer most closely allied with the Surrealists was Elsa Schiaparelli, known for her amusing and outrageous attacks on the idea of conventional fashion. In 1937 Jean Cocteau collaborated with her, creating drawings to be embroidered on the back of an evening coat (twin profiles, forming the outline of a vase with pink silk roses) and on the front of a jacket (a woman's head and shoulders, with a cascade of golden hair of beads down the right sleeve). That same year Salvador Dalí designed a hat for her in the shape of a high-heeled shoe, a sort of Surrealist tricorne, and created the fabric for her "Tear Dress," which featured the illusion of numerous holes. (Forty years later, fashion history repeated itself when Rei Kawakubo introduced sweaters strewn with ready-made holes.) The 1938 Paris

who could afford big art prices could have access to the work. The Pop Shop makes it accessible. It was all about participation on a big level."

These criticisms of artists have been mirrored almost exactly in the fashion world. When Yves Saint Laurent showed his "Mondrian" dresses in 1965, and the following year brought out his "Pop Art" dress with an outline of a nude body that closely resembled Pop artist Tom Wesselmann's painting series "Great American Nudes," some critics thought that he had become too slavishly "artistic." Yet it can surely be argued that when, say, Bill Blass styles a Matisse painting on the back of a woman's jacket, as he did two years ago, he is affirming a century-long sentiment that designers are not denigrating but celebrating art. And artists who are attracted to fashion recognize not only its chic but its ability to participate in mass culture, as Haring said, on a big level.

In any case, the art and fashion connection continues, and not without artists' willing participation. French painters Jean Charles Blais and Ben (Vautier) have both hand-painted dresses for their compatriot, designer Jean Charles Castelbajac. Ben's was emblazoned with the tongue-in-cheek phrase, "Je suis toute nue en dessous," that is, "I'm completely naked underneath"; Blais' featured one of his characteristic lumbering bodies with a very tiny head. In 1988 Saint Laurent used a bird motif by Georges Braque, combined with a Cubist guitar design, on an evening gown. Japanese designer Issey Miyake, in a recent collection, used a stiffened pleated fabric that evokes the Winged Victory of Samothrace. And Jean Paul Gaultier has picked up on the splash-and-drip paintings of Jackson Pollock, merging them with business-like chalk stripes for women's suits.

A sideline to all of this collaborative verve, incidentally, is the creation of window displays for clothing and jewelry stores, which has become a virtual tradition among 20th-century artists: Man Ray, Dalí, Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, and Andy Warhol are the most famous among the many artists who have been tempted by the offering of a continual, if casual, audience of viewers. Julian Schnabel has gone one better by designing an entire boutique, in New York, for the French designer Azzedine Alaïa, including benches and clothing racks that look very much like his sculptures. And when, in 1983, *New York* magazine asked such artists as Alex Katz, David Salle, Red Grooms, and Jean Michel Basquiat to create backdrops for a series of fashion spreads, it was following a line that goes back at least to 1937, when *Vogue* commissioned fashion "photo-paintings" from Dalí, Pavel Tcheitchew, and Giorgio de Chirico.

With fashion and art both becoming more pervasive elements of contemporary life, it is inevitable that they will continue to cross over each other.



COURTESY THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

Expo, which was largely a celebration of Surrealism, featured mannequins dressed by Man Ray, Dalí, and André Masson. In the late 1930s and '40s, the Surrealists were frequent contributors to the pages of *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*, and they continued to use the imagery of their art in fashion items and accessories.

The effect of this ongoing collaboration has not, of course, always been wholly salutary. Critics, from time to time, ridiculed the Surrealists for their involvement with fashion. And the resistance still crops up now and again. The late Keith Haring, who first came to prominence in the early 1980s for his lively graffiti figures that decorated the New York subways, is one such case. His populist bent was celebrated until he opened his Pop Shop in SoHo, which sold not only posters and prints but T-shirts, bags, jackets, and hats bearing his distinctive cartoonlike imagery. At that point, some critics complained that he'd gone too far and become too populist. He stated in one of his last interviews, "My work was starting to become more expensive and more popular in the art market. These prices meant that only people

Gustave Caillebotte, Paris; A Rainy Day, 1876-77. The clothes—and the lives—depicted were not so different from the viewer's; the everyday became an acceptable subject in painting.

in today's fashion magazines. In museums, costume and fashion exhibitions are becoming increasingly popular. (The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York is mounting an exhibition in December called "Théâtre de la Mode," which will feature post-World War II French fashions displayed on dolls, with sets created by artists of the period.) And fashion photography, despite some critical rebuffs, is appearing on gallery and museum walls throughout America and Europe. Indeed, the time it takes for an image to jump from a magazine's pages to the walls of an exhibition is constantly shrinking, as proved by recent gallery shows of Herb Ritts and Bruce Weber in New York.

Though the connection has grown closer, there are still inevitable differences between the two. Art is typically private, the creation of an individual. Fashion is public, a collaboration between de-

RIGHT Francisco de Zurbarán's *Saint Elizabeth of Portugal*, ca. 1630-35. **LEFT** Christian Lacroix's adaptation of the saint's voluminous folds for an evening dress. The designer was roused to take a Spanish turn by retrospectives of Zurbarán and Velázquez.

signer, manufacturer, and wearer and then between wearer and viewer. Art requires time, contemplation, and thought. Fashion is instantaneous—a flash of color and shape on the street; a new idea to be mocked or embraced; a surprise, a temptation, a flirtation.

Both art and fashion can reflect and distill the concerns of the moment in potent and surprising ways. But while most of us are not artists, we all get dressed every day—and fashion, by default, becomes our creative outlet. For many of us, dressing is our one opportunity to express ourselves visually, to exhibit flair, to demonstrate our mood, to add color to our days. Fashion designers understand this. They give us this opportunity to vent our creativity. Despite the hype and verbiage of overenthusiastic fans and the press, fashion designers don't usually speak of themselves as artists. They have too much respect for art to believe that. They know that art is eternal and that fashion designs are, on the whole, ephemeral. But then so is life.

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