

ADELHEID DE WITTE

ANY WISHES?

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C A D O G A N

## ADELHEID DE WITTE IN CONVERSATION WITH FRANCESCA MARCACCIO

### *Introduction*

*By Francesca Marcaccio*

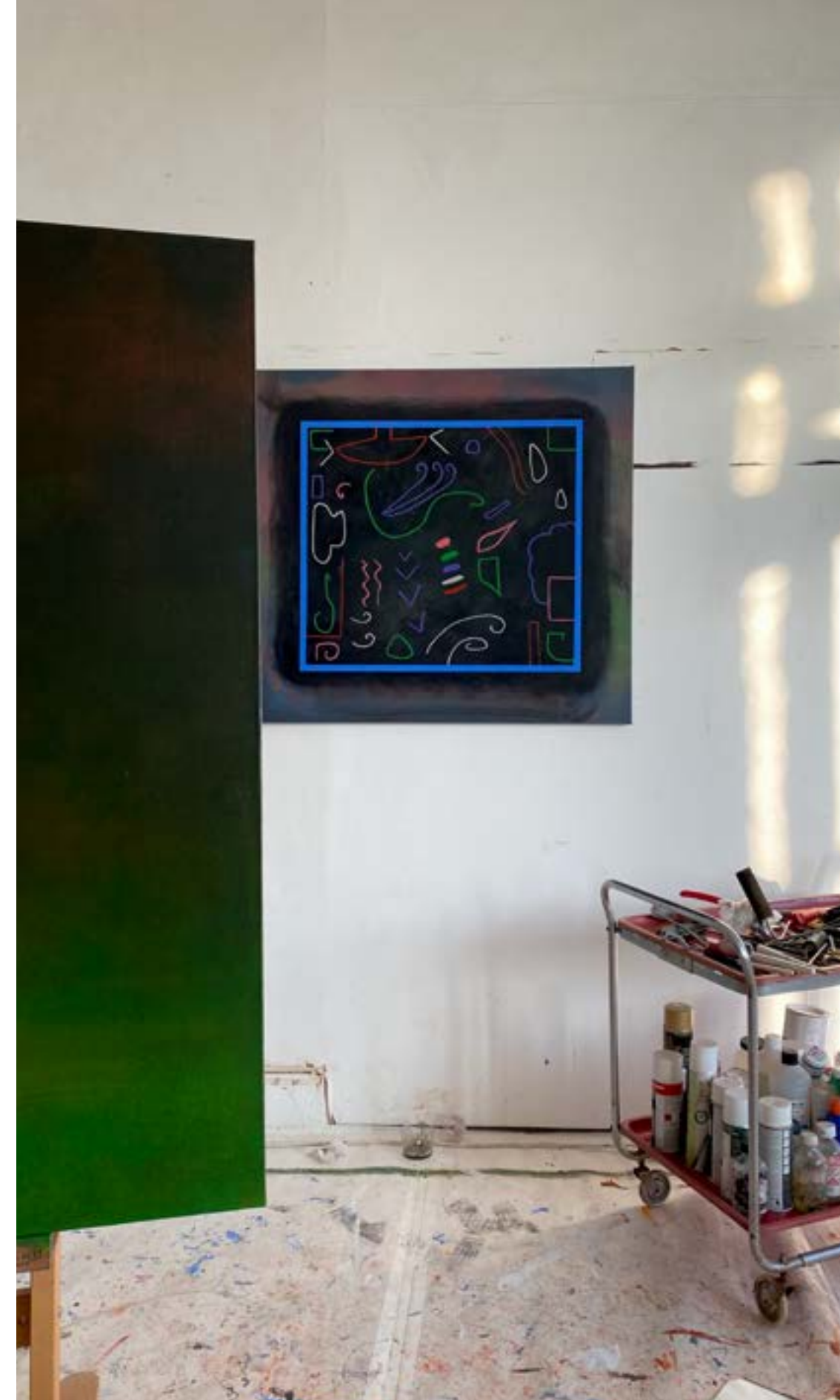
Adelheid De Witte's paintings look like intricate portals that summon the sense of being suspended in an ever-moving infinity. Whether playing on an infinite loop, disrupting synchronicity, or following a rhythm, Adelheid De Witte explores the expansion of time and space through her work. For her first solo show, *Any Wishes?* at Cadogan Gallery in London the artist creates an installation exploring the architectures of the subconscious. Her signature is an emotionally charged style, embracing a lightness of touch in these works, adopting a composition that breathes through the whole area of the canvas.

Refusing unity, the interconnected lines and forms in the works in *Any Wishes?* recall Lacan's understanding of the psyche as made of separate but interacting systems. In the universe De Witte creates, the artist becomes the hermetic, magical thinker that acts as a mediator between spirit and sense, the past and the future.

*Could you tell us about your background and how you got into the arts?*

*When and why did you start to make art?*

I graduated from university in Ghent as a Master of Ethics, with a special interest in bioethics. By studying the moral, social and legal issues that arise in biomedical research, I was bringing together my preoccupation with philosophy, biology and psychology. What I loved most about this field of study was to combine the way we view society in the modern world with the way ethical questions have been approached in past eras. This combination of old and new is something that keeps on returning in my artwork as well. I've been drawing, painting and making sculptural interventions for quite some time before having my first open studio in 2015, followed by my first museum exhibition in 2018 (Biennial of Painting at Museum Dhondt Dhaenens) and my first gallery solo show in 2020 (Barbé Gallery). Being a full-time artist nowadays, I have set my philosophical practice aside but in a way I use similar dynamics when I paint, draw or make installations. My artistic practice is characterised by constant change, activity and reflection: connotations shift all the time as different layers, patterns or objects come together.



*In your current exhibition, Any Wishes?, at Cadogan Gallery in London, the paintings oscillating between the figurative and the abstract demonstrate a great power as individual units and when they are confronted with the architecture of the space they are themselves a test of aesthetic power. Could you guide us through this body of work and tell us more about how your practice evolved over the years?*

My body of work arose from research into the relationship between humans and the environment. More specifically I have been interested in the way people modify their surroundings: how homes are built and decorated, how artificial objects are confronted with naturally occurring materials or how unnatural light relates to natural luminescence. At the very beginning of my artistic practice I used to make spatial interventions with found objects, which I incorporated into assemblages and installations. These works already showed an aspiration to combine old and new materials, but also my will to break out into space. The tension between inner and outer has been reappearing ever since. A depiction of an object can relate to a physical reality. When combined with a cloudy mass however, it can be a means of describing a certain mood or inner world. In a sense, I might not purposely be reflecting on how the natural world shapes our own sense of identity. Besides that, the dynamics between outside and inside can also be observed quite literally in some of my works. By painting frames and dividing lines on top of layers of oil paint, the border between in and out becomes an important part of the entire painting. Outer edges, open surfaces and defined areas are all combined in one image.

Although my works have become more and more abstract in the last couple of years, figuration hasn't completely disappeared. Most of the objects or landscapes I paint however, dissolve into the background and become vague lines and structures once they're (partly) covered with new layers of paint. The represented elements then fade out. Combined with contrasting shapes and colours, light and shadow, the end result is rather confusing: what is it that you really get to see?

*Moving between painting, sculptural elements and installation you capture a kind of beauty that's uncanny in some ways, but it is also rooted in materiality. It's very much in the here and now, it's present in every sense. Although, there is also a sense of invincible connection with the earth. What is your relationship with your paintings and how much of your inner world influences your creative process?*

I grew up in a third generation building company with all kinds of construction materials. I used to play in the middle of piles of sand, stones, bricks, and concrete slabs when I was a child. I remember making a lot of constructions with the objects I found there. I guess I have never really lost the urge to put different elements together and shape them into a new piece. Moreover, the company still exists and hasn't been altered, providing a lot of stuff I can actually work with nowadays. I adore the older, weathered tools with a green, orange or brown patina. I often use these rather earthly colors as opposed to the lighter layers or more contemporary colours and materials. The dialogue between natural tones and brighter shades seems to be a red thread in my body of work.

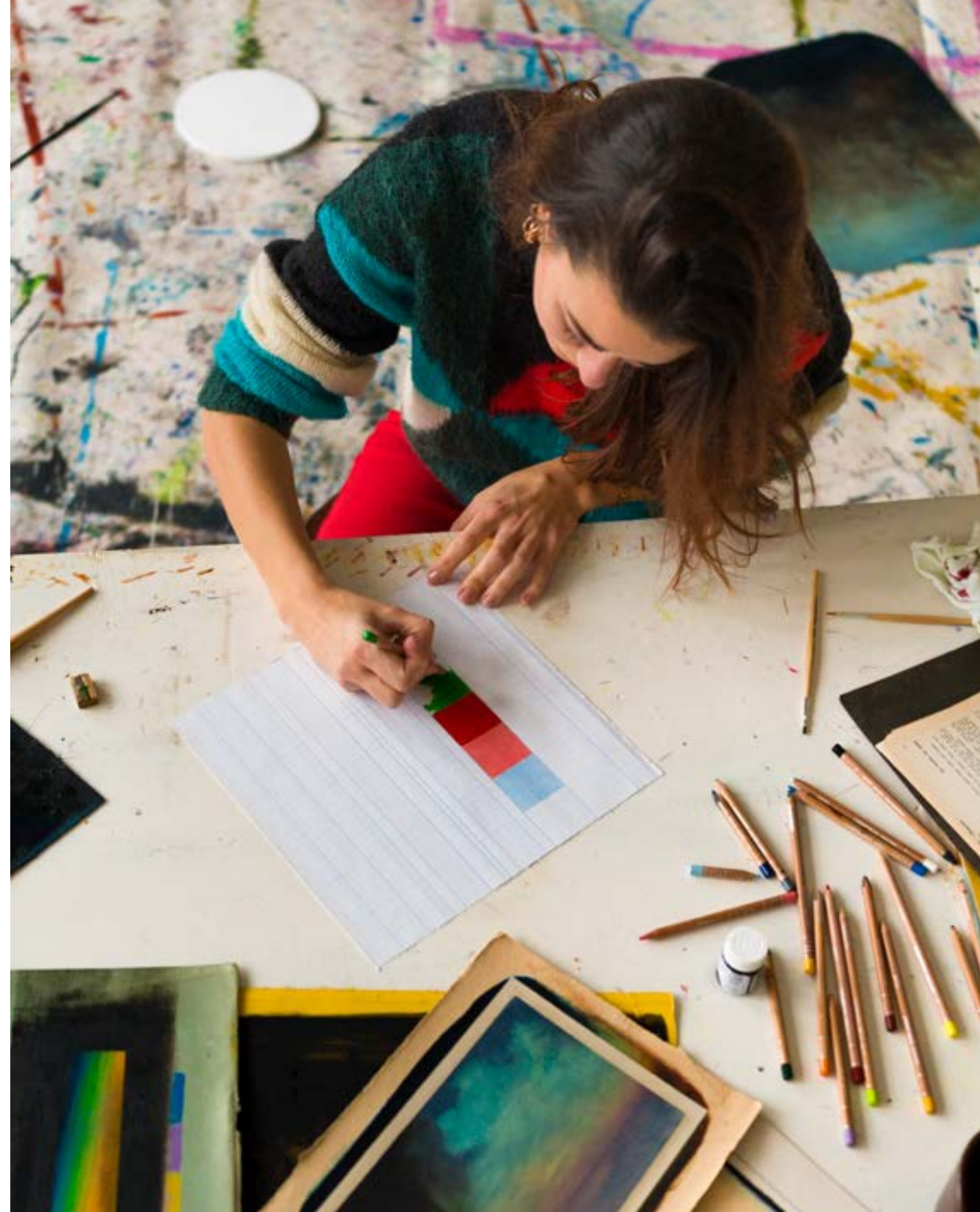


*There is something allusive, elusive and illusive in your works that keeps coming back to haunt the present. This of course is built into the technique of drawing and erasing, where one drawing is altered hundreds of times on the same sheet of paper or canvas. In this way there is always a trace of what was there before: what was erased, suppressed or forgotten. Would you tell more about your creative process, how an idea takes on its final shape?*

First of all, I never really have a specific idea when starting to work. And even when I do, I rarely stick to the plan. I haven't got the ability to focus my attention on finishing something from A to Z without being distracted. I also find it less stimulating when knowing how something is going to look in its final shape before it's even finished. So I work on several pieces at the same time jumping from one sheet of paper or canvas to the other, putting a line here, adding a contour there. It creates many traces, like you describe here. And it happens more than once that the combination of several fragments surprises me.

*One definition of your paintings that you have put forward is that it is a continuous work-in-progress. Time as a theme seems to run through many of your works; at points it's at the forefront and in other cases it's conveyed technically by the multiple layers on the canvas, the visible and invisible strokes, the speeding and the erasing. Can you elaborate on the role that the concept of time plays in your practice and your relationship to it? Is time something that you find yourself grasping with constantly? How is time reflected in your other works?*

Time is divided into three parts: the past, the present and the future. The past is considered as unchangeable, the present is going on at this very moment and the future is rather undetermined. Those three are nonetheless intertwined. Yesterday's brushstrokes are already belonging to the past but depicting a landscape in the same way as 19th century painters did, might be happening on one of my canvases today. And painting a geometrical structure this evening may be nothing but a possible design for a sculpture in the future. I like to look at my work as a continuous work-in-progress uniting these three frames. It therefore might have the potential to create a sense of disorientation. There's something very beautiful about getting lost, to be a bit confused about what you see and where you are. At least to me it is. I also tend to find beauty in the procedure of searching and experimenting. If something is in progress, it means it isn't complete, it isn't perfect. If something is lacking, it also means the search, the work can continue.



In a way the title of my exhibition is also related to this way of working. 'Any Wishes?' seems to be a question towards the other: Is anything lacking? Is there anything you would like? It is a question that covers many possible answers. It can be asked in a daily, rather common context. When checking into a hotel for example. The answers could then vary from 'having an early breakfast' to 'an extra towel'. At the same time asking about someone's wishes can also be understood in a broader context. It could be considered typically human. There is always something lacking, something that could make us happier, more satisfied. The French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Jacques Lacan has developed his concept of the object-cause of desire around it. We have the feeling, as subjects, that our lives aren't complete. We try to fill that gap without really knowing what it is that we desire: Possessions? Love? Knowledge? Calmness? Security? There's this famous saying that summarises this thought quite well: 'May you get all your wishes but one, so you always have something to strive for'.

This lack of something, without really being able to pinpoint what it exactly is, corresponds very well with my artistic process. I work at a slow pace, taking the time to search for clues within my drawings, paintings and installations. This exploration is also visible due to the many layers I apply. I draw, erase, paint, overpaint, wipe away, leave some elements and cover others. It takes time to let that happen, to wait until I want to add or remove something. Most of my pieces are in my studio for more than a year until they're finished. And even when finished, I tend to look at them as unfinished pieces, seeking for parts that make me want to explore further in other works. It's an ever-ongoing search.





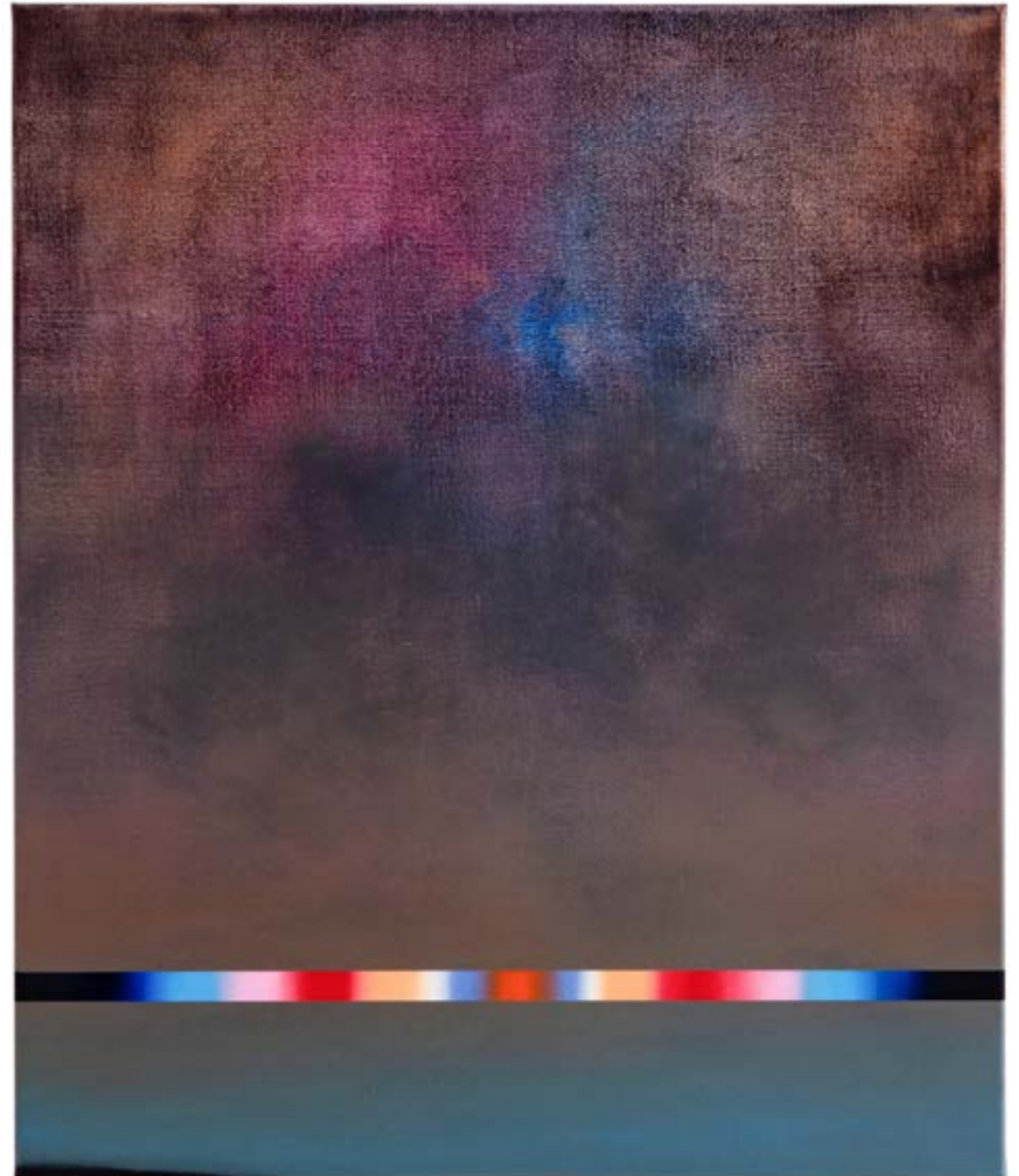
**Pure Cashmere**

oil on linen, 60cm x 50cm



**A Good Night's Sleep**

oil on linen, 60cm x 50cm





**A Tie Score**

oil and ink on paper  
30cm x 24cm



**Another Frame**

oil, pastel coloured pencils and ink on paper  
30cm x 24cm

**The Other Half**

oil on linen, 60cm x 50cm







**Let's Fade into the Sun**

oil on linen, 90cm x 80cm



**A Flying Carpet Would Be Nice**

oil on linen, 63cm diameter



**Tabula Rasa I**

oil on linen  
42cm x 32cm



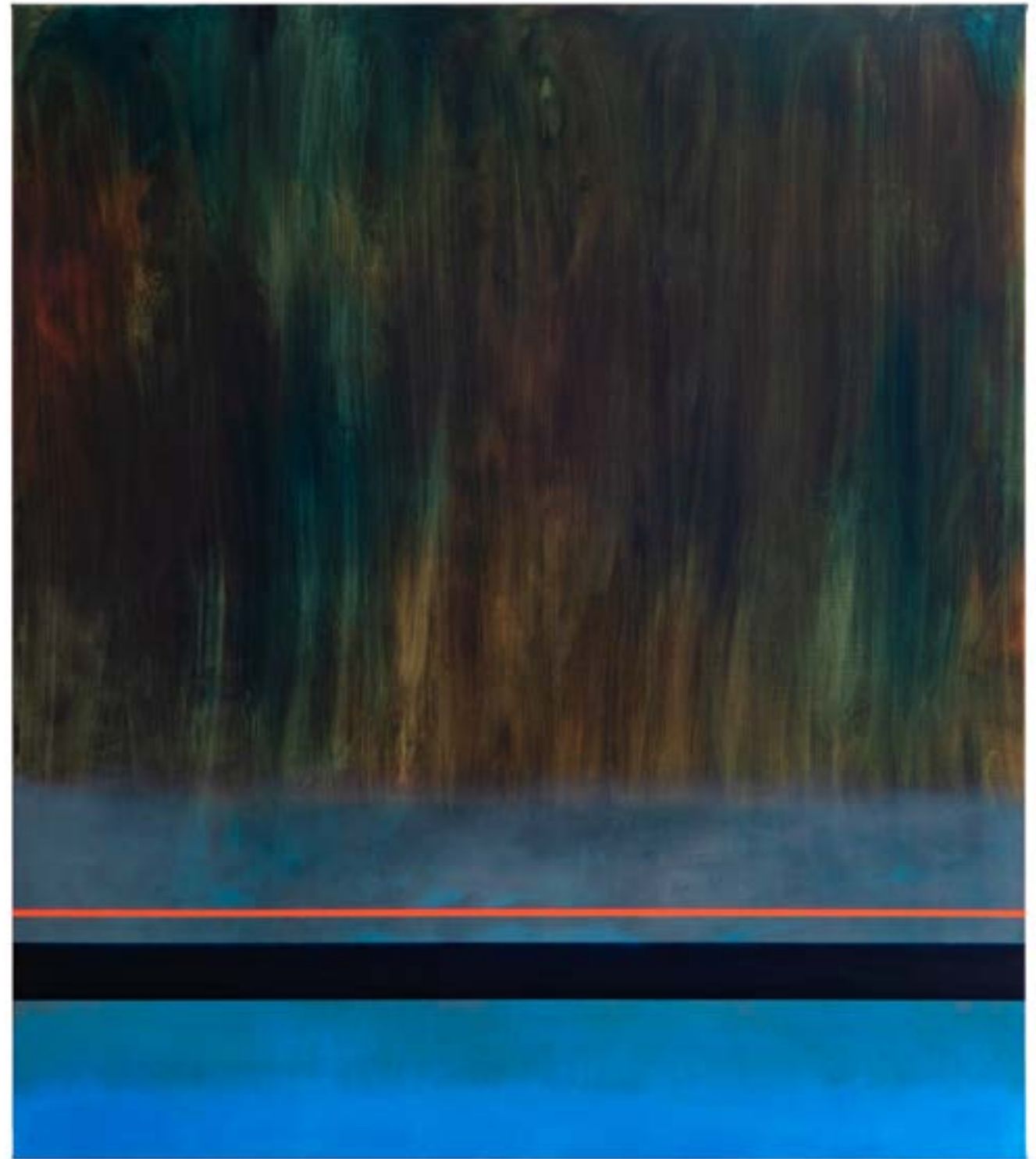
**Tabula Rasa II**

oil on linen  
42cm x 32cm



**Another Night**

oil on linen, 160cm x 140cm







**A Different Direction**

oil on linen, 40cm x 40cm



**A Free Mind**

oil on linen, 50cm x 50cm



**A Rare Find**

oil on paper  
24cm x 30cm



**A Sweet Day**

oil on paper  
24cm x 30cm



**A Good Story**

oil on linen, 60cm x 50cm



**Hand Drawn Wallpaper**

oil on linen, 60cm x 50cm







**A Private Language**

oil on linen, 80cm x 100cm

**Another Day**

oil on linen, 140cm x 160cm



**May I Invite You?**

oil and pastel on linen, 30cm x 30cm





**A Good Stretch**

oil on ink on paper  
30cm x 24cm



**A Starless Night**

oil on paper  
30cm x 24cm

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

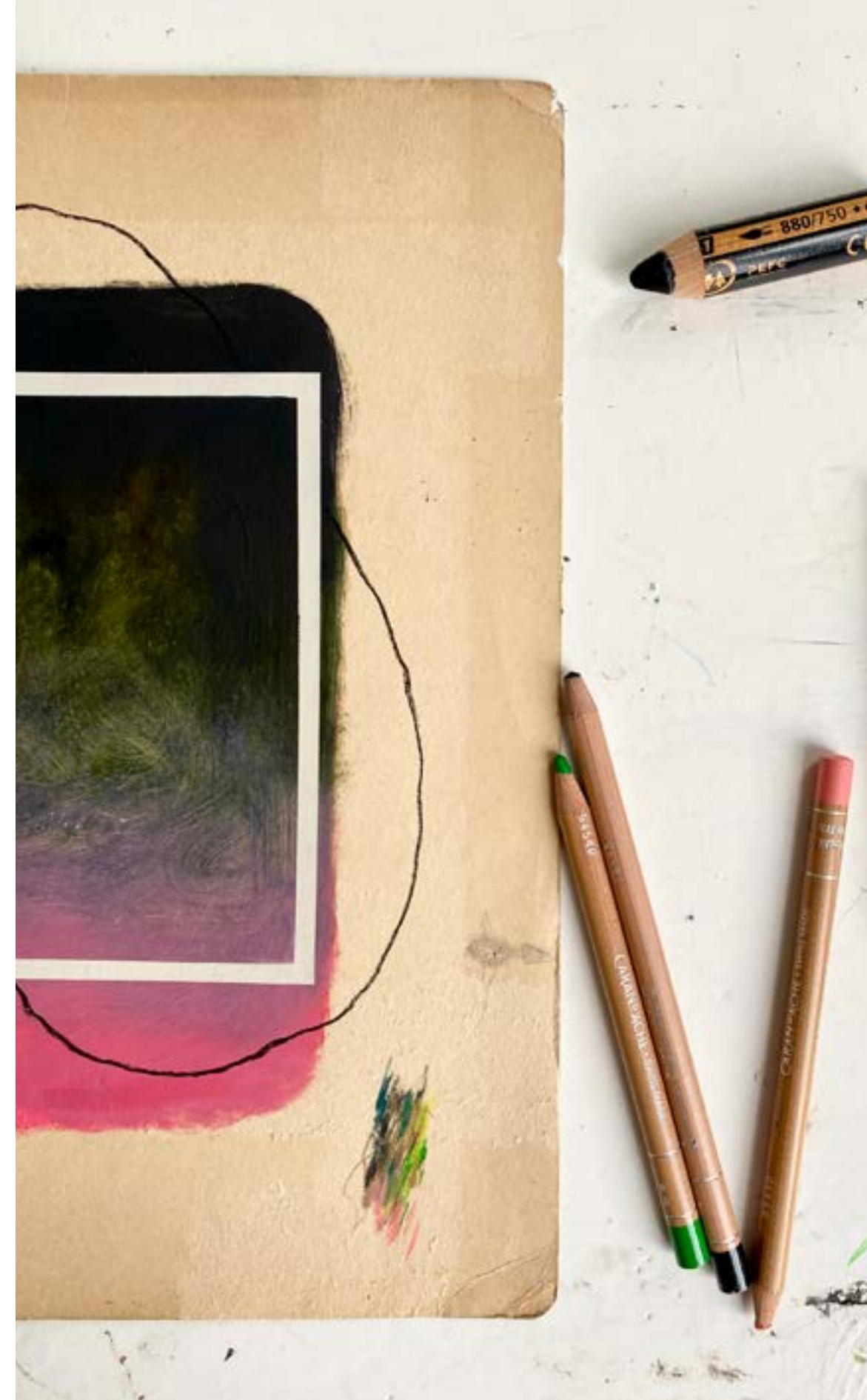
- 2021 CHIT CHAT, Art on Paper, BOZAR, Brussels, BE
- 2020 THERE ARE FIREWORKS AT 11 PM, Barbé Urbain Gallery Ghent, BE
- 2019 RUST & RUHE, No Pop No Up, Ghent, BE
- 2016 ESPACE #43, galleries RIVOLI, Brussels, BE
- 2016 SILENCES, Secondroom, DOK, Ghent, BE
- 2016 EVER AFTER, At One, Ghent, BE
- 2015 HOLIDAYS ON MARS ARE JUST DECADES AWAY, Ghent, BE
- 2015 GUEST ROOMS, Gent, BE

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2023 IN MEDIA RES, Barbé Gallery, Ghent, BE
- 2023 MOON JUICE, Waldburger Wouters, Brussels, BE
- 2022 WONDERING, WANDERING, WINTERING, Villa Les Zéphyr, Westende, BE
- 2022 ART ON PAPER, Vanderborght Building, Brussels, BE
- 2022 MAGELLAN, Knokke, BE
- 2022 STEALING THUNDER, Barbé Gallery, Ghent, BE
- 2022 ROOK, Nationaal Tabaksmuseum, Wervik, BE
- 2022 HET OOR, Bruthaus Gallery, Waregem, BE
- 2021 ART@WORK, Domein De Cellen, Oostkamp, BE
- 2021 SALON d'O, Thermae Palace, Oostende, BE
- 2021 (PR)OXYMORON, Knokke, BE
- 2021 PASS, Mullem - Wannegem - Huise - Lede, BE
- 2021 BALLROOM project, Borgerhub, Antwerp, BE
- 2020 ARE(N)A, Kusseneers Gallery, Brussels, BE



- 2020 REDIRECTED, Godshuis Cornelis Lantschot, Antwerp, BE
- 2020 TUSSENHUIDS, Helmond, NL
- 2020 STAYCATION, Ghent, BE
- 2020 L' HEURE BLEUE, Plus-One Gallery & Gallery Sofie Van de Velde, Antwerp, BE
- 2020 BALLROOM PROJECT, Antwerp, BE
- 2020 CAMPARI CREATES X COLLECTIBLE, Brussels, BE
- 2020 WORKS ON PAPER, Anouk Vilain, Diepenbeek, BE
- 2020 THE SYNDICATE OF BELGIAN PAINTERS, Borgloon, BE
- 2019 AT NIGHT YOU DANCE, Barbé Urbain Gallery, Ghent, BE
- 2019 NORTHERN LIGHTS, Kusseneers Gallery, Brussels, BE
- 2018 Christie's Charity Auction, Museum Dhondt Dhaenens, BE
- 2018 BIENNIAL OF PAINTING, Museum Dhondt Dhaenens, BE
- 2017 YOU CAN'T, Yellow, Varese, IT
- 2017 YUGEN#02, Ghent, BE
- 2017 RE-ART2, Zaventem, BE
- 2017 BAD/Arture - ICC, Ghent, BE
- 2016 RADISSON ART AWARD, BE
- 2016 Pop-up exhibition Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle, BE
- 2016 Arture x Architectenwoning Jef Wauters, Deurle, BE
- 2016 Arture x Filatuur, Art Space, Knokke, BE
- 2015 D.ART, Mechelen, BE
- 2015 PASS, Mullem-Huise-Wannegem-Lede, BE
- 2014 ALPINE CLUB BOECHOUT, Mortsel, BE





Contact for information

[www.cadogangallery.com](http://www.cadogangallery.com)  
[info@cadogangallery.com](mailto:info@cadogangallery.com)

Cadogan London  
87 Old Brompton Road  
London, SW7 3LD  
+44 (0)20 7581 5451

Cadogan Milan  
Via Bramante 5  
Milan 20154  
+39 028 969 0152

Published in conjunction with the exhibition:

Adelheid de Witte, 'Any Wishes?'

at Cadogan Gallery, London  
26th April - 27th May 2023

Artwork Images: Peter Maes  
Studio Images: Peter Maes, Shivas de Schrijver and  
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