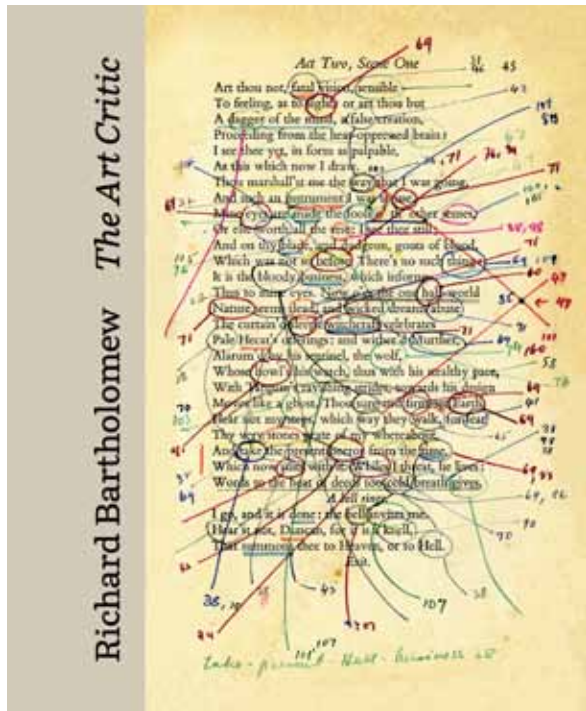


# Richard Bartholomew

## *The Art Critic*

An insider's account of the birth of Modern Indian Art



**Archive Editors:** Rati Bartholomew, Carmen Kagal, Pablo Bartholomew  
**Introduction:** Geeta Kapur

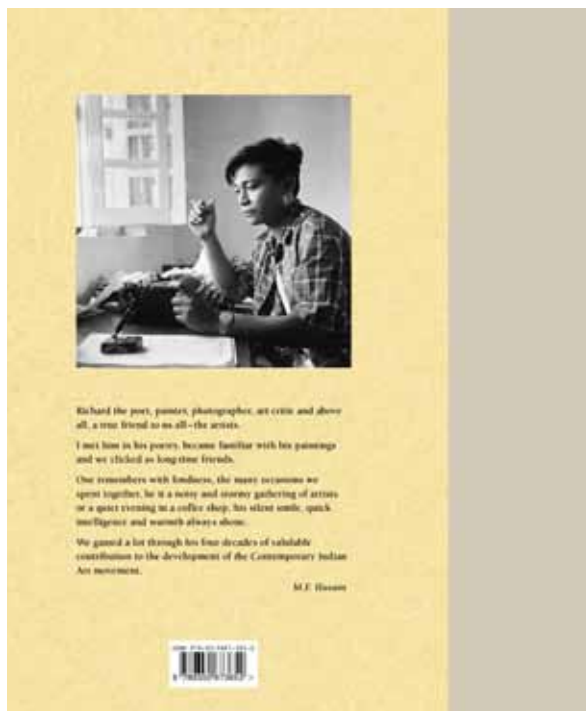
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**“No person becomes an art critic by writing six column inches of ‘appreciation’ ten times a month. He must do better and more.”**

Between the 1950s and the early 80s, Richard Bartholomew wrote relentlessly about art. He challenged institutions like the Lalit Kala Akademi and the NGMA with his provocative questions about the role of the state in promoting art; he visited artists' studios, befriended them, and advocated on their behalf the need for an aesthetic language that could reflect the modern Indian condition; he curated some of the most prominent shows of art in India and abroad, and, in his capacity as director of Kunika Chemould, the country's first commercial gallery, nurtured some of the finest Indian artists.

As critic for the Indian Express, The Times of India, and Thought Magazine, Richard was privy to some of the definitive moments in the history of Modern Indian art. Seen in retrospect, his massive body of writing on art is prophetic as it harks bak to an era when Indian painters such as S.H. Raza, M.F Husain, Tyeb Mehta, FN. Souza, Ram Kumar, and others who were still struggling to break free from the tired, overused idiom of the Bengal school and work within a more nuanced understanding of what constitutes the modern aesthetic; a time when paintings were sold for “the price of a bottle of whiskey or a cotton sari” as Richard recorded in one of his pieces.

Abridged from the original, this selected collection offers the contemporary reader a flavor of that birthing period in the history of Modern Indian art in a voice that is authoritative yet accessible, while establishing a standard for critical art writing. Over ten years in the making, it is both a tribute and a testimony to Richard's overwhelming, though unacknowledged, contribution to the evolution of Modern Indian art and the development of art criticism in India.



Richard the poet, painter, photographer, art critic and above all, a true friend to us all—the artists.

I met him in his parry, became familiar with his paintings and we talked as longtime friends.

One remembers with fondness, the many occasions we spent together, be it a lively and merry gathering of artists or a quiet evening in a coffee shop, his calm, witty, quick intelligence and warmth always there.

We gained a lot through his five decades of valuable contributions to the development of the Contemporary Indian Art movement.

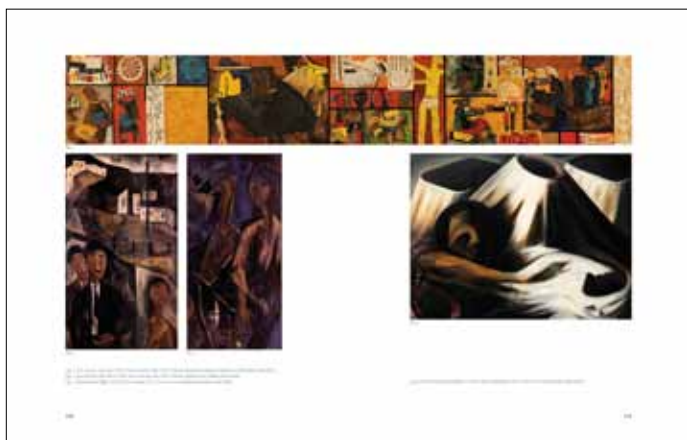
M.F. Husain



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### Richard Lawrence Bartholomew: A Brief Chronology

(1926–1985), Art Critic, Photographer, Poet, Painter

Richard Bartholomew escaped from Burma around the time of the Japanese invasion during the Second World War and made New Delhi his home. Here, he earned his Bachelor's and Master's degree in English Literature, after which he began his career as a full-time art critic writing for various newspapers, journals and magazines. His creative writing includes poems and short stories which were published frequently in journals like *Thought* and *Illustrated Weekly of India*. As a painter, he held one-man shows in New Delhi and Bombay in the 1950s and 60s. As a photographer, he recorded life around him including his family and artist friends. *A Critic's Eye*, a selection of his photographs, was exhibited at Sepia Gallery, New York, in 2008; at Photoink, New Delhi, in January 2009; at Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai, in 2010; at Harrington Street Arts Centre, Kolkata, in 2010; and at Fishbar Gallery, London, in 2011.

**1926** Born, November 29, in Tavoy, Burma

**1930** Schooled at St Paul's, Rangoon, Burma

**1942** Fled to India during the Japanese occupation of Burma

**1948** B.A. (English), St Stephen's College, New Delhi

**1950** M.A. (English), St Stephen's College, New Delhi

**1951–1958** Teacher, Modern School, New Delhi

**1953** Married Rati Batra

**1955–1960** Art Critic, *Thought*, New Delhi

**1958–1960** Assistant Editor, *Thought*, New Delhi

**1958–1962** Art Critic, *Indian Express*, New Delhi

**1960–1963** Director, Kunika Art Centre, New Delhi

**1962** onwards Art Critic, *Times of India*, New Delhi

**1966–1973** Curator of Tibet House, the first museum of Tibetan Art, New Delhi

**1970–1971** Senior Fellowship, John D. Rockefeller III Fund, New York

**1977–1985** Secretary, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi

**1982** Commissioner, Contemporary Indian Art, Festival of India, Great Britain

**1984** Invited by the Japan Foundation to meet artists in Japan

**1985** Died, January 11, in New Delhi

### PUBLICATIONS

**1971** Husain, Harry N. Abrams, New York (co-author)

**1972** *The Story of Siddhartha's Release* (poems), Writers Workshop, India

**1973** *Poems*, Writers Workshop, India

**1974** Krishna Reddy (*Contemporary Indian Art series*), Lalit Kala Akademi, India

**1986** *The Cycle* (sonnets), Writers Workshop, India

**2009** *A Critic's Eye*, Chatterjee & Lal, Photoink and Sepia International, India

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Richard Bartholomew approached his task with a high degree of seriousness. His perception of the role of art critic is reflected in the two articles in this section.

Criticism in India, Cultural Forum, June 1959

Criticism and Contemporary Indian Painting parts I & II, Thought, June 15, 22, 1957

### Section 2: The Development of Indian Art

Apart from the day-to-day task of reviewing exhibitions, Bartholomew occasionally cast an overall look on contemporary Indian art, analysing trends and charting developments in painting and sculpture. As is inevitable, a certain degree of repetition is present in these articles, but it serves to underscore the consistency of Bartholomew's views and perceptions.

Indian Painting since 1947, Thought, August 13, 1955

Trends in Contemporary Indian Art, Views on Contemporary Art, 1957

Contemporary Indian Painting, Modern Art of Asia, Japanese Cultural Forum, 1961

The Visual Arts Mature, Times of India, August 15, 1972

Contemporary Indian Painting, 1973

Recent Trends in Graphics, Thought, January 26, 1974

Contemporary Painting and Sculpture, The Indian Experience, Festival of India, UK, 1982

### Section 3: Affinities

An unusual, if not unique, aspect of Bartholomew's criticism was his perception of affinities in outlook, attitude or technique between the works of individual artists. His examination of these similarities in small groups of painters is reproduced in this chapter.

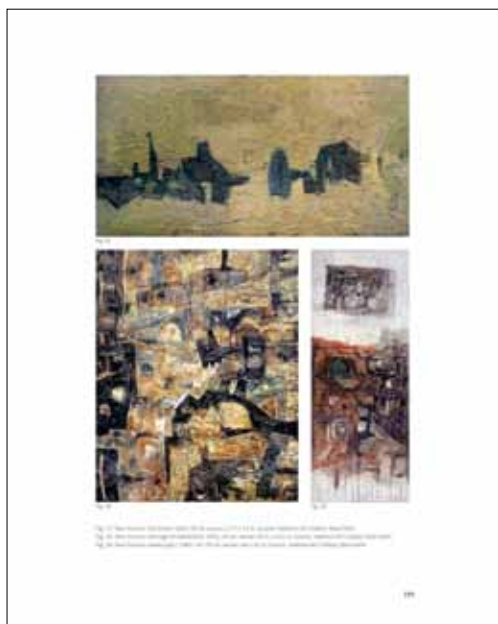
Plastic Surgery and X-ray in Recent Indian Painting, Thought, August 24, 1964

Esoteric, Organic, Photographic and Picturesque, Thought, March 16, 1974

Light and Colour as Themes of Vision, Thought, April 13, 1974

Nature and Abstraction: An Enquiry into their Interaction, Lalit Kala Contemporary, No.23, 1977-78

Attitudes to the Social Condition: Notes on Ram Kumar, Satish Gujral, Krishen Khanna and A. Ramchandran, Lalit Kala Contemporary, No.24 and 25, 1978



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### Section 4: Pen Portraits

A close bond of friendship existed between Bartholomew and some of the leading painters of the day. This enabled him to provide intimate glimpses of their personalities, their methods of work, or their philosophy of art. The artists came to life in the pen portraits that follow.

The World of Sailoz Mookherjea, *Thought*, October 15, 1960

The Smile of the Mountains: Kanwal Krishna, *Thought*, January 1, 1960

Banker-Painter, *The Statesman*, September 11, 1957

Ram Kumar, Kunika, exhibition catalogue, November 1961

Biren De, Kunika, exhibition catalogue, November 1961

The Wall of Satish Gujral, *Span*, June 1961

The "Letters" of M.F Husain, *Thought* Sept. 1971

M.F Husain, (extract) Husain, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1971

### Section 5: Politics of Art

Bartholomew took the Lalit Kala Akademi to task for its retrograde attitude toward the development of art and for its whimsical method of awarding prizes at its national exhibitions.

Art and the Akademi – I, *Thought*, February 22, 1958

Art and the Akademi – II, *Thought*, March 1, 1958

Art and the Akademi – III, *Thought*, March 8, 1958

Playing Possum in Art, *The Statesman*, February 1, 1959

The Art of the Akademi, *Thought*, February 21, 1959

Art in the Shadow of Official Patronage, *Thought*, March 21, 1959

A Short Biography of the Lalit Kala Akademi, *Thought*, November 21, 1959

If Gold Should Rust What Shall Iron Do?, *Thought*, August 3, 1974

### Section 6: Pioneers

Rabindranath Tagore, Amrita Sher-Gil, Jamini Roy.

The Beautiful Penumbra, *Thought*, January 1, 1966

Amrita Sher-Gil – Her Life and Paintings, *Indian and Foreign Review*, May 1, 1972

Jamini Roy and the Akademi, *Thought*, July 6, 1974

### Section 7: The Fifties

The decade of the fifties was a turbulent period in Indian art, highlighted by the boycott of the Lalit Kala's National Exhibition in 1959 by 20 leading Indian artists. It was in the early fifties that Bartholomew started his career as art critic, a career which continued until the eighties. In this chapter reviews of group shows are reproduced first, followed by notices of one-man exhibitions

The First National Exhibition of Art, *Thought*, April 9, 1955

Second National Exhibition of Art, *Thought*, January 28, 1956

Exhibition of Eight Painters, *Thought*, December 1, 1956

The Contemporary Indian Art Exhibition, *Thought*, December 6, 1956

Delhi Silpi Chakra: Tenth Annual Exhibition, *Thought*, March 29, 1958

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Trends in Modern Indian Art, Design Magazine, February, 1959  
Fifth All-India Sculpture Exhibition, Thought, May 23, 1959  
Biren De: A Problem of Space and Colour  
The Noble Savage and the Ascetic: The Paintings of Biren De, The Vak Review, Summer, 1958  
The Paintings of Ram Kumar, Hindustan Times Weekly, October 23, 1955  
Ram Kumar and the Theatre of the Mind, Thought, October 10, 1959  
Forty Works by M.F. Husain, Thought, December 14, 1957  
Recent Paintings by M.F. Husain, Thought, December 19, 1959  
Paintings of Krishen Khanna, Thought, November 8, 1958  
Satish Gujral: The Agony of Belief, Thought, January 7, 1956  
Contemporary Indian Artists: Dhanraj Bhagat, Design Magazine, March 1959  
"Composition 1957", Thought, September 28, 1957  
The Human Form in Indian Sculpture, Thought, September 5, 1959  
The World of Laxman Pai, Thought, September 27, 1958  
Paintings by S.H. Raza, Thought, May 16, 1959  
Paintings and Sketches by K.G. Subramanian, Thought, April 23, 1955  
Sculptures by Shanko Chaudhuri, Thought, December 29, 1956  
Paintings That Depict the Indian Psyche, The Statesman, February 16, 1957  
29 Paintings by H.A. Gade, Thought, February 1, 1958  
Sculptures by C.P. Rajaram, Thought, January 3, 1959  
Paintings by Anjolie Ela Dev, Thought, October 24, 1959  
Paintings by Jaswant Singh, Thought, December 26, 1959  
Paintings, Ceramics and Batik Work by Devayani Krishna, Thought, December 14, 1957  
The Graphics of Kanwal Krishna, Thought, December 7, 1959

### Section 8: The Sixties

The unrest that first surfaced in the previous decade continued through the sixties, with senior artists declining to participate in one or another of the National Exhibitions. The selection by the Lalit Kala of artists for their several awards also came in for severe criticism. A landmark event during this period was the holding in 1968 of the First Indian Triennale, which brought world art to the country for the first time.

Indian Triennale: First Impressions, Thought, February 24, 1968

Delhi Silpi Chakra Annual Exhibition, Thought, March 18, 1961  
The Elusive Image: Delhi Silpi Chakra Annual, Thought, March 11, 1967  
The Second Generation of Painters, Thought, April 2, 1960  
The Dark is Light Enough, Thought, January 16, 1960  
Exhibition: Satish Gujral's Paintings, Exhibition catalogue, Forum Gallery, New York, 1964  
Impressions of Varanasi: Wax and Ink Paintings by Ram Kumar, Thought, May 7, 1960  
A Question of Focus, Sunday Standard, January 1, 1961  
Rare Clarity and Power Part of Husain Make-Up, Times of India, April 1, 1965  
Drawing-room Decorations, Thought, October 23, 1965  
Jeram Patel, Catalogue, 1963  
Material and Medium, Thought, September 25, 1965  
Eighteen Paintings by Biren De, Thought, December 9, 1961  
Krishen Khanna, Roop Lekha, Vol.32, No.II, 1962  
Fourteen Sumi-e-Paintings, by Krishen Khanna, Thought, December 4, 1965  
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A Sculptor Dedicated to Nature, Catalogue, October 1, 1961  
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Stripped Trees and Bird Catchers: 15 Paintings and 3 drawings by J. Sultan Ali, Thought, January 8, 1966

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Sultan Ali, A Painstaking Painter, Times of India, February 23, 1969  
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Gulammohammed Sheikh, Exhibition catalogue, February, 1963  
Painter Who Shocks People, Times of India, February 14, 1965  
The Writing on the Wall, Thought, March 5, 1966  
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The Bird in Hand, Thought, March 19, 1966  
The Map or the Diagram: 22 Paintings by Himmat Shah, Thought, March 26, 1966  
Spectacle of Sex in Sundaram's Paintings, Times of India, March 30, 1966  
No Man is an Island, Thought, April 23, 1966  
Artist 'Earnest' but Art 'Bore', Indian Express, January 7, 1962  
Magic Lantern Show, Thought, December 17, 1966  
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Pilgrim's Progress: Retrospective Exhibition of the Paintings of K.K. Hebbar, Thought, November 23, 1968  
Padamsee's Paintings are Drawings in Colour, Times of India, March 8, 1969  
Impressive Display of Benode Bihari's Works, Times of India, March 14, 1969  
Paintings and Sketches by Jaya Appasamy, Thought, March 19, 1960  
Subtracting from Nature, Thought, November 25, 1967  
Lush, Variegated Textures, Times of India, March, 1966

Matbar Singh, Exhibition catalogue, 1963  
Group Show of Graphic Art: Kunika Group Show of Works by Tyeb Mehta, Husain, Gaitonde, Ram Kumar, Kanwal, Devayani Krishna and others, Exhibition catalogue, December, 1961  
The Krishnas: Kanwal and Devayani, Exhibition catalogue, January, 1960  
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Interesting Intaglio Prints on View, Times of India, January 18, 1969  
Graphic Show by Alkazis of a High Standard, Times of India, March, 1964  
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Between Quality and Quantity Photographs by T.S. Satyan, Sunil Janah, Thought, December 25, 1965  
Personal Photography: "Life in Germany": A Photo Essay by T.S. Satyan, and documentary prints from the Federal Republic of Germany, Thought, October 29, 1966  
Seventh Members' Photographic Exhibition, Thought, April 23, 1960

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'The Rejects' Win First Round at Silpi Chakra, Times of India, February 22, 1972

Interesting Canvases on Show, Times of India, November 13, 1972

Souza's Drawings on Display, Times of India, November 29, 1972

Interesting Exhibition of Art by Group, Times of India, March 12, 1974

Young Painters Shine Among Contemporaries, Times of India, March 16, 1972

Massive Art Show for Serving a Cause, Times of India, February 17, 1977

Calcutta Artists Have Surrealist Approach, Times of India, October 15, 1972

Manifestations of Group Spirit, Thought, October 26, 1974

Mixed Group of Bengal Artists, Times of India, April 6, 1976

Kerala Artists Rooted in Myth, Folklore, Times of India, October 18, 1975

The Gujral Artefact, Thought, January 5, 1974

A Painter for All Seasons, Times of India, September 29, 1975

Ram Kumar '73, Exhibition catalogue, December 22, 1972

The Abstract Principles in the Paintings of Ram Kumar, Lalit Kala Contemporary Nos. 19 & 22, 1975-76

Ram Kumar's Hallmark of Maturity, Times of India, December 10, 1977

Souza's Shock Treatment, Times of India, February 3, 1973

Presence of Time Evident in Souza Work, Times of India, February 3, 1976

Santosh's Serious Essays in Paint, Times of India, March 31, 1970

Esoteric Principle in Painting, Times of India, November 28, 1973

Vision Still Evident in Santosh's Paintings, Times of India, March 23, 1976

The Lone Wolf: Recent Paintings by Jeram Patel, Thought, January 24, 1970

Jeram Patel, Catalogue XIV, Sao Paulo Biennale, 1977

Krishen's Paintings are Strong and Direct, Times of India, January 9, 1972

Common Objects Presented in Unusual Way, Times of India, February 26, 1975

Khakkar's One-man Show of Paintings, Times of India, February 22, 1970

Bhupen Khakkar's 26 watercolours, Times of India, October 26, 1976

Laxman Pai, Times of India, October 28, 1975

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V. Sundaram: A Lyrical Painter, Times of India, September 28, 1972

On Grafitti, Spaghetti and Social Comment, Times of India, March 20, 1976

Elements of Surprise in Paramjit's Paintings, Times of India, April 13, 1975

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Tyeb's Paintings of Unfinished Character, Times of India, February 13, 1972

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Jehangir Sabavala: Painter of People, Times of India, April 19, 1976

Fine Constructions in Plaster, Times of India, March 28, 1973

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Jatin's Works Impressive, Times of India, October 31, 1974

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Excellent Paintings, Metal Reliefs by Vasudev, Times of India, December 27, 1975

Arnawaz's Paintings Have Element of Cogency, Times of India, December 1, 1975

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Saroj Pal Gogi, Exhibition catalogue, 1979 – 80  
Surrealist Keen on Musical Analogies, Times of India, November 18, 1972  
Works of Personal Expressionsm Times of India, March 6, 1972  
Decorative Paintings by Dhiraj Choudhury, Times of India, January 17, 1976  
Red Key Colour in Mohanti's Paintings, Times of India, February 22, 1977  
Ram Kinkar's Watercolours Show Variegated Vastness, Times of India, September 26, 1976  
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Krishna Reddy, Monograph, 1974  
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Devayani Krishna, Monograph, 1976  
Variegated Show of Bright, Grey Prints, Times of India, June 10, 1970  
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Prints with Brilliance of Paintings, Times of India, February 5, 1976  
Very Fine Show by Group 8, Times of India, December 14, 1976  
Bonanza for Art Buyers At Graphic Workshop, Times of India, March 20, 1974  
Print-making Workshop Shows Good Results, Times of India, February 16



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