

Critical Cultures

Elective

Programme

Spring Trimester

25
NCAD

**The deadline to
sign up for an
elective is 4pm
Wednesday 22nd
January 2025**

**Confirmation of
your elective by
Monday 27th
January 2025**

**Classes start on
Wednesday 29th
January 2025**

An elective is an on-site 90-120 minute class offered by the Critical Cultures programme by the School of Visual Culture.

You will be sent a link to sign up for your Critical Cultures Elective.

If you have not received the link, please email visualculture@staff.ncad.ie

The invite to sign up is sent to your NCAD email address.

Students sign up for one elective **unless** they are Joint Course year 2 or year 2 BA Visual Culture. (These students sign up for two).

Final year Joint Course and Final Year BA Visual Culture students sign up for one elective.

Some electives will be over-subscribed. We cannot guarantee your first or second choice of elective but we will do our best.

Please do not sign up for an elective you have already studied before.

Details of times and summaries appear on the following pages.

The rooms will be announced later.

Times

Cultural Matter: Originality, Taste and Value in the Age of Mass-production

Ria Czerniak-LeBov

9.30-11.30 Wednesdays

Dublin: Materiality and Space

Lisa Godson

9.30-11.30 Wednesdays

What is Contemporary Art?

Declan Long

9.30-11.30 Wednesdays

Design (as) Activism

Kate Buckley

9.30-11.30 Wednesdays

Usefulness, Uselessness, Usability

Lisa Godson

11.30-13.30 Wednesdays

Psychology of Space

Silvia Loeffler

11.30-13.30 Wednesdays

Fashioning Societies: Europe

c.1500 - c.1900

Hilary O Kelly

11.30 -13.30 Wednesdays

Art in Times of Crisis

Emma Mahony

11.30-13.30 Wednesdays

Improvisation: Attempts at Making Utopia

Judit Csobod

11.30 - 13.30 Wednesdays

Queering The Post-Natural

Jye Benjamin O'Sullivan

13.30 -15.30 Wednesdays

The Female City

Denis Kehoe

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Systems and Network Ecologies: The Aesthetics and Politics of Inter-connection

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Thinking About Photography

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Breaking the Rules

Larissa Vilhena

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Once Upon a Time in Cinema

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Colour and Emotion

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Fashion and the Archive

Hilary O Kelly

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Radical Exhibition-Making

Sarah Pierce

15.30-17.30 Wednesdays

Cultural Matter: Originality, Authenticity and Value in the Age of Mass-production

Ria Czerniak-LeBov

9.30-11.30 Wednesdays

From fine art prints and multiples to collectibles and ornaments, this course will examine modern and contemporary society's relationship to mass-production. In an age characterised by digital reproduction, fast fashion and single use goods, the original, innovative, handmade and bespoke are increasingly valued.

During this course, students will consider the importance of such conditions, questioning the status of replicas, limited editions, copies and fakes. We will also be looking at perceptions of high and low culture, considering terms such as kitsch, readymade and craft in a bid to examine the hierarchies of value attributed to various cultural matter. Readings will include texts by Walter Benjamin, Rosalind Krauss, Clement Greenberg, Thierry de Duve and Alice Sherwood.



Jasper Johns, Racing Thoughts, 1983. Encaustic, screenprint, and wax crayon on collaged cotton and linen. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York;

Dublin: Materiality and Space

Lisa Godson

9.30-11.30 Wednesdays

This class will explore the materiality of Dublin city including how it has been understood and represented by key fiction and non-fiction writers, artists, architects, urban thinkers and spatial theorists. The intention is for us to arrive at a better understanding of the urban environment, paying particular attention to ways we might research, interpret and be inspired by the banal and marvellous in the immediate surroundings of NCAD. This will be underpinned by an engagement with spatial theory including the work of thinkers such as David Harvey, Doreen Massey and Gillian Rose.

Topics covered will include case studies of particular sites including Dublin Port and the Royal Hospital Kilmainham, housing and gentrification, contemporary architecture, logistical landscapes and creative mapping.

Container storage, Dublin Port (south) 2023



What is Contemporary Art?

Declan Long

9.30-11.30 Wednesdays

Barking guard dogs, AI-directed robots, a scent that triggers tears, an astronaut's skeleton: over the past decade, all these have been main components of acclaimed contemporary artworks (by Anne Imhof, Pierre Huyghe, Tania Bruguera and Tavares Strachan). In each case — in dramatically different styles — these artists have explored the limits of what is acceptable or appropriate as the form and content of an artwork.

In this Critical Cultures elective we will focus on the challenging diversity of contemporary art today: reflecting on how art remains a field for testing new ideas and alternative approaches to creative and critical thinking. We will study important ways that art has changed in the wake of modernism and postmodernism — considering recent developments in video, photography, painting, sculpture, installation, performance and other less easily categorised forms. Central to the course will be consideration of how artistic practices are responding to the cultural, social and political circumstances of our present era, often presenting us with new and difficult questions about technology, the body, territory, race, community, mass media and even the lasting significance of art itself.



'Robert' by Tavares Strachan, a neon figure created after the form of Robert Henry Lawrence, Jr., the first African American astronaut to visit space.

Design (as) Activism

Kate Buckley

9.30-11.30 Wednesdays

This elective explores the capacity of design to entice progress and change within society. We will investigate how designers have become agents of change and how design practice has evolved as a result. We will look to define design [as] activism through various writings as well as using projects that span environmental, gender, political and global-local concerns.

Through image and video-based lectures the purpose, intention and outcome of socially engaged and radical practices will be explored. Projects that will be discussed may be situated outside of commercially driven practice so we will question how designers have and can integrate personal beliefs with their professional practice.



*Forensic Architecture:
The Architectural-Image-Complex, Rafah:
Black Friday, 2015*

Usefulness, Uselessness, Usability

Lisa Godson

11.30-13.30 Wednesdays

This elective is based around the concept of usefulness across a series of intersecting domains including fine art, product design, fashion, graphics, architecture, literature and urban planning. Drawing on work by thinkers such as Sarah Ahmed and Shannon Mattern we will trace the idea of usefulness, out of use, used, used up, used to, unused, in use, useless, usable and overused. We will explore practices that seek to find new ways of being useful and new ways of thinking about publics that might variously be described as users, viewers, participants, readers and consumers.

Please note that the content of the elective is partly generated by the students taking the class, and you will be expected to submit some material on a weekly basis and participate in class discussion. Among the case studies we will encounter are the aspirations of Constructivist artists to be involved in industrial production, thinking behind Arte Útil (Useful Art) for new uses for art, the aesthetics of tech-wear and protest and the investigative aesthetics of Forensic Architecture and Airwars.



Tania Bruguera , urinal, art historical references, porcelain enamel, ca. 54 x 32 x 35 cm, (2009) production 2016

Psychology of Space

Silvia Loeffler

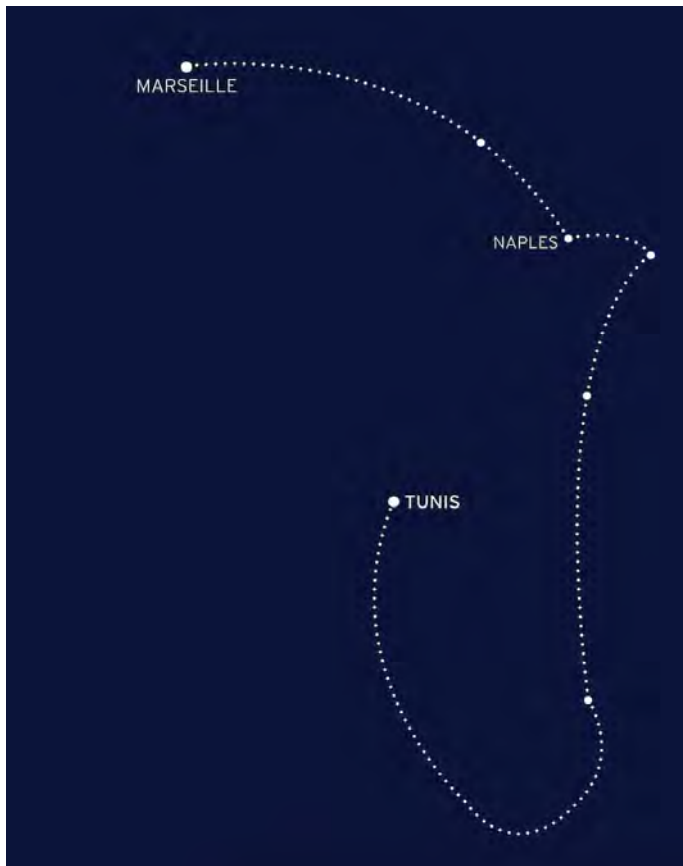
11.30-13.30 Wednesdays

How do we belong? This elective explores why we are drawn to certain spaces and are disconnected from others, and who 'we' are in the wide variety of spatial contexts.

We will analyse place-based feeling (rootedness) and its counterparts (displacement and nomadism), and we will create a rhythm-analysis of our personal routes.

We will analyse our relationships with the city and rural landscapes; the need for blue and green spaces; how sites shaped by memory, trauma and mourning can be counter-balanced with transformation.

We will discuss and make emotional mappings about what it means to feel home, to feel home-sick, and to exist in between. Our explorations will be based on key texts by Claudette Lauzon, Svetlana Boym, Chinua Achebe, and James Joyce.



Bouchra Khalili, *The Constellations*, 2011 © The Artist



Fashioning Societies: Europe

c.1500 - c.1900

Hilary O Kelly

11.30 -13.30 Wednesdays

The politics of dress are increasingly recognised in subjects such as sustainability, race and gender. Who pays the price for fast fashion? For whom is fashion a matter of self-expression? How far does the democracy of fashion extend?

Historical dress on the other hand is often treated as simply a series of outlandish or quaint costumes. But dress has always been political. This course will explore how concepts of individuality, identity, democracy, gender and status have shaped the ways people have dressed in Europe over about 500 years.

While the range is historical, the aim is as much to illuminate dress today from norm to aberration. Although, fashion is often treated in terms of the new and the future, much of what is worn today has embedded precedent. The course thus aims to develop a literacy of dress within the cultural sphere, from the objects themselves to the meanings around them.

Rublack, U. & M. Hayward (2021) *The First Book of Fashion: The Book of Clothes of Matthaeus and Veit Konrad Schwarz of Augsburg (produced 1520 – 1560)*, Bloomsbury

Art in Times of Crisis

Emma Mahony

11.30-13.30 Wednesdays

This elective interrogates how art and artists have responded to social, ecological and economic, crises from the 80s to now. It will consider the role that capitalism and its bedfellows: colonialism, imperialism, patriarchy, white supremacy and extractivism have played in fomenting global injustice and climate breakdown.

It will begin by focusing on the legacy of the critical art practice termed 'institutional critique' in order to reflect on and challenge the shifting social, economic and political conditions that shape today's late capitalist reality. It will examine the evolution of 'institutional critique' during this same period, from its emergence as a practice targeted at art museums and galleries but simultaneously sanctioned and censored by them, to what I term 'interstitial critique', a form of parasitic critique that infiltrates the art institution from below. Interstitial critique holds the art institution to account for its complicity – through the receipt of corporate sponsorship – in perpetuating climate change, precarious working conditions, and ultimately, the white supremacist, colonial narratives that underscore these related grievances. Subsequent classes will examine the various 're-directional turns' that have shaped artistic practice since the 90s, including 'the social turn', 'the collaborative turn', and 'the activist turn'.

For the final two classes students will work in groups to map routes from 'crisis' to 'utopia' and to test out unlearning exercises that challenge the neoliberal art school and the values it propagates, including 'individualism and competitive behaviour', 'busyness' and a negative interpretation of 'failure'.



Still from *Enmedio, Party at the Employment Office, 2009*. Image permission: Enmedio



Women shouting on a field bare chasted with skirts raised. Nicola Hunter, *Raising The Skirt, 2014*, Newcastle image credit Felicia Knox

Improvisation: Attempts at Making Utopia

Judit Csobod

11.30 - 13.30 Wednesdays

Improvisation plays a key role in everything we do, think and imagine as humans. It advises our conversations and our relationships, it surrounds, sustains and guides us in a broad variety of situations and environments. A major force in our past and present art practices, improvisation represents an essential inquiry in art making from music to dance, literature, architecture and fine arts. It informs diverse areas of study including social change and human rights struggles, conflict, trauma and healing, pedagogy, interaction and performance studies.

This elective introduces students to key concepts in the interdisciplinary field of critical improvisation studies and invites them to experiment with building individual and collective research questions through a mix of traditional readings, presentation challenges, multi-media learning resources, discussions, debates, games and exercises. It equips students to successfully connect areas of art practice, activism, community care and pedagogy in the students' art practice by experimenting with concepts of listening, rust/risk, flow, dissonance, responsibility, liveness, surprise, and hope.

We will utilise works by groups of artists, activists, educators and improvisers including the afrofuturists, the situationists, performance and live art and Dogme 95 to advance our radical learning experiment.



Queering The Post-Natural Jye Benjamin O'Sullivan 13.30 -15.30 Wednesdays

Queering The Post-Natural traces, the complex relationship between queer theory and discourses on the “Natural” and “Post-Natural” through a wide range of artistic, design-based, and theoretical practices. From European Shamanic practices as explored by Rick Dolphijn to the queer vampiric subject of artists such as Yong Xiang Li, this elective aims to firstly give participants a grounding in Queer Theory. Secondly, it aims to explore the way that the category of “Natural” has been formed in relation to Euromodernity. Finally, we will bring these two discourses together in a discussion of the post-natural, grounding participants in the discourses that contextualise contemporary Queer Ecological artistic practices.

By the end of the elective, participants will be not only familiar with contemporary discourses on the intersection between queer theory and the post-natural, but will also be equipped to use this intersection as a lens to analyse varying different mediums, including video, text, painting, installation, textiles and performance.



*Yong Xiang Li I'm Not in Love (How to Feed on Humans), 2020
single-channel video,*

The Female City Denis Kehoe 13.30 - 15.30 Wednesdays

This elective examines various intersections between females and the European city of the 19th and early 20th century. It explores the role of women (and girls) during the progress of modernity, and with respect to the expanding and changing city. The representation of figures such as the mother, the prostitute/sex worker, the suffragette, the woman of colour, the lesbian and the Jewish woman are all investigated and discussed.

The elective analyses both how these women's lives were represented during the period, as well as how they are represented today. A multi-disciplinary approach is taken, drawing on fiction, opera, cinema, TV, contemporary news, photography and painting. Ideas from feminist theory, urban theory, queer theory, Marxism and psychoanalysis, including the work of Elizabeth Wilson, Laura Elkin and Judith Walkowitz, are used in reading and understanding the different material under discussion.



Sylvia Pankhurst mural in Bow, East London (Jerome Davenport, 2018)

Systems and Network Ecologies: The Aesthetics and Politics of Interconnection

Francis Halsall
13.30 - 15.30 Wednesdays

We live in the "Century of the System" (Gawande). We are all significantly, inextricably, unavoidably, connected together by global systems that are: meteorological; technological; biological; informational; social and so on. From supply chains to online activities, our contemporary lifestyles would be impossible without systems and networks.

Perhaps the world system is a single entity. Within its networks various things are transmitted that include: people; money; information; ideas; memes and viruses. From networks of Social Media to the emerging Internet of Things; from health-care systems to furniture systems, air-conditioning systems, clothing systems and many others, systems and networks are embedded into our life, and us into them.

The aim of this elective is to consider the ecologies of these systems by considering the relationships between systems and their environments. We'll look at some definitions of key terms in the theories of these systems and networks and demonstrate how these can be applied to a wide variety of cultural and social practices including art and design. We will reflect on the aesthetics of digital and (so-called) new media alongside other implications of the applications of systems and networks as metaphors for complex forms of organisation.

We will consider how the systems and networks we live in are far from neutral but have social, political, epistemological and ethical consequences. They shape the way we all live and think.



A startling murmuration over Lough Ennell, Co. Westmeath. Picture: INPHO/James Crombie, The Irish Examiner, (13th Dec, 2023)

Thinking About Photography

Fiona Loughnane

13.30 -15.30 Wednesdays

Photography surrounds us. On a daily basis we take and view countless photographic images. But it's a slippery and fugitive medium, with constantly changing technologies and processes, allowing images to be widely circulated and reproduced in a bewildering range of contexts. Photography is part of a modern expansion of vision which opens the world to our view; but is also a means through which we ourselves are increasingly subject to the gaze of others. This elective will introduce critical ideas about photography drawing from key figures such as: Roland Barthes; John Szarkowski; Luigi Ghirri; Kaja Silverman; Ariella Azoulay and John Tagg.

The course will include both historic and contemporary forms, ranging from the carte de visite to Instagram. While the work of notable photographers – such as Lee Friedlander, Susan Meiselas, and Trevor Pagalen – will be discussed, the course will also engage with anonymous, vernacular and commercial practices. Ultimately, this elective will introduce debates about the essential characteristics of photography and its diverse functions and situations.



Erik Kessels, *24 hours in photos*, 2011

Profane Spaces

Vaari Claffey

13.30 -15.30 Wednesdays

This elective explores how artists, designers and architects 'make profane' those spaces, artefacts and materials that may hold some 'sacred' value in relation to historically dominant ideologies. It will also consider the reverse process, when objects or practices once regarded as profane are made 'sacred'.

The art and design worlds have long been invested in ascribing value and preciousness to steady objects: what is the potential of making materials and objects behave unexpectedly, changing their previous use and context?

The elective examines how artists and designers find strategies to break taboos, using materials and aesthetics to expose exclusionary tactics and suggest a re-ordering of hierarchies. In doing this, we will explore some of the claims that have been made for magic and spirituality in relation to both practice and reputation.

The work and histories explored include those of Jennifer Higgie, Karrabing Film Collective, Sun Ra, Magiciens de la Terre and Madonna.



Sun Ra invokes the Egyptian gods at the Pyramids - source unknown, 1971



Breaking the Rules

Larissa Vilhena

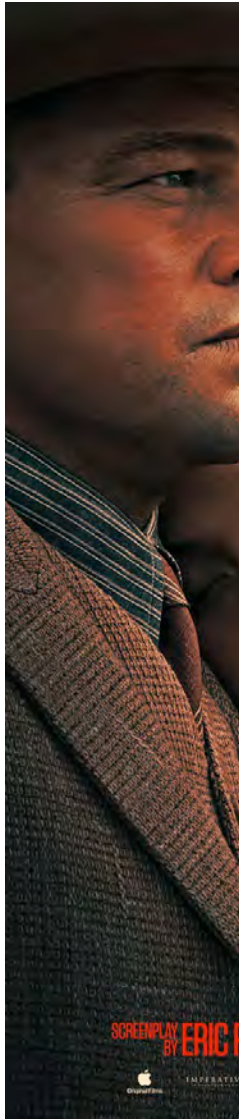
13.30-15.30 Wednesdays

Artists have always been known for being trailblazers, dismissing past styles and rejecting conventional approaches to art. The first examples of modern art emerge in the mid-19th century, giving rise to a succession of avant-garde movements that focused on a wide range of innovations in terms of subject matter, form and technique, among others.

This elective will examine the modern artist as a rule-breaker by tracing some of the key developments surrounding the rejection of academic values from the 1840s to the 1880s. At that point in Britain, a group of young artists, the Pre-Raphaelites, would unite in opposition to the Academy and discard its formulaic notions about drawing and painting in search of new sources of inspiration. This class will also look into other examples of 19th-century artistic groups that broke with tradition, such as the Realists and the Impressionists in France, and Gustav Klimt in Austria, and their non-conformist attitude towards art.

Finally, this elective aims to assess the legacy of those early avant-garde movements for artists in the 21st century.

John Everett Millais, Ferdinand Lured by Ariel, 1850, oil on canvas, Makin collection..

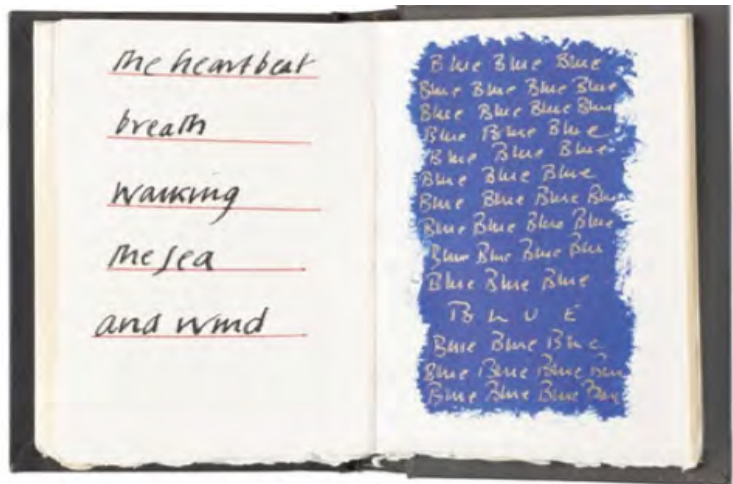




Once Upon a Time in Cinema Denis Kehoe 15.30-17.30 Wednesdays

What is the role of the director in a film? How does the director put her or his imprint on their work? How do they construct a narrative in a way that is specific to them? How do the films they make represent wider social, political and historical issues and events? This elective series will explore the work of ten directors and how their films fit into the history of cinema.

Amongst the directors under discussion will be Quentin Tarantino, Sofia Coppola, Claire Denis, Jane Campion, Spike Lee and Alfred Hitchcock. The films of these directors will be examined using a variety of lenses including psychoanalysis, theories of gender and race, Marxism, postcolonialism and auteur theory. Connections will be drawn between their creations and the worlds of fashion, graphic design, architecture and music. This elective would be ideal for anybody who wants to deepen their knowledge of the history of cinema and investigate the various potentialities of the medium of film.



"Epitaph" in Derek Jarman's *Sketchbooks*, published by Thames & Hudson (2013)

Colour and Emotion Silvia Loeffler 15.30-17.30 Wednesdays

What feelings are being expressed when we feel blue, see red, or move between shadow and light? This elective explores a variety of conceptual, psychological and cultural meanings of colour in art, design and cinematography. We will elaborate on the language of colour in music, art, design, cinematography, and fabrics in various world cultures. Our journey will be guided by Derek Jarman's colour meditations in *Chroma*, which will be one of our key readings.

We will analyse historical and social shifts; cultural perceptions and expressions of grief and melancholia and joy and renewal; sacredness and controversy; ideology and ambivalence; claustrophobia and openness; and how the use of colour is the embodiment of emotions that shape our memories and dreams.

Fashion and the Archive

Hilary O Kelly

15.30-17.30 Wednesdays

Through exploring archives, we will analyse dress using objects, images and texts as evidence. Combining visual, material, historical and theoretical analysis, the aim of the elective is to develop skills essential to fashion studies. The aim is to study historical garments as a source for contemporary design and fashion thinking.

Today, students commonly claim Instagram and social media as sources for fashion research: this object and archive-based study will highlight the cultural riches of the real object and original sources. Evidence embedded in garments will be used to develop historical and cultural research and to support or contest received histories and theories of fashion.



Ricerca Mazzini Archive, a collaboration partner of Bologna University, Italy <http://www.archividiricercamazzeni.it>

Radical Exhibition-Making

Sarah Pierce

15.30-17.30 Wednesdays

This elective invites students to critically engage with processes of presenting, curating, and creating art that challenge traditional norms and conventions. By examining diverse media—from installation art and live performances to activist projects and archives—students will gain a deeper understanding of the exhibition as an artistic medium rooted in practice. Exhibitions often take place at sites of ideological and institutional power. They are socially charged, culturally disposed, and have the potential to reproduce, reinforce or disrupt dominant narratives.

We will look to radical exhibition-making as the material manifestation of a type of critical theory that supports other ways of knowing, seeing and thinking. Our weekly lectures will explore case studies and assigned texts that students are expected to read before class.

In addition, the elective will include site visits to local galleries where we will meet curators and consider exhibitions in real-world contexts. As we look beyond the artworks involved we will gain critical insight into some of the conditions, negotiations and circumstances that impact exhibition-making behind the scenes, and invoke exhibitions as radically optimistic propositions nonetheless.



Khaled Hourani and Rashid Masharawi Picasso in Palestine 2012 (unpacking the masterpiece)

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