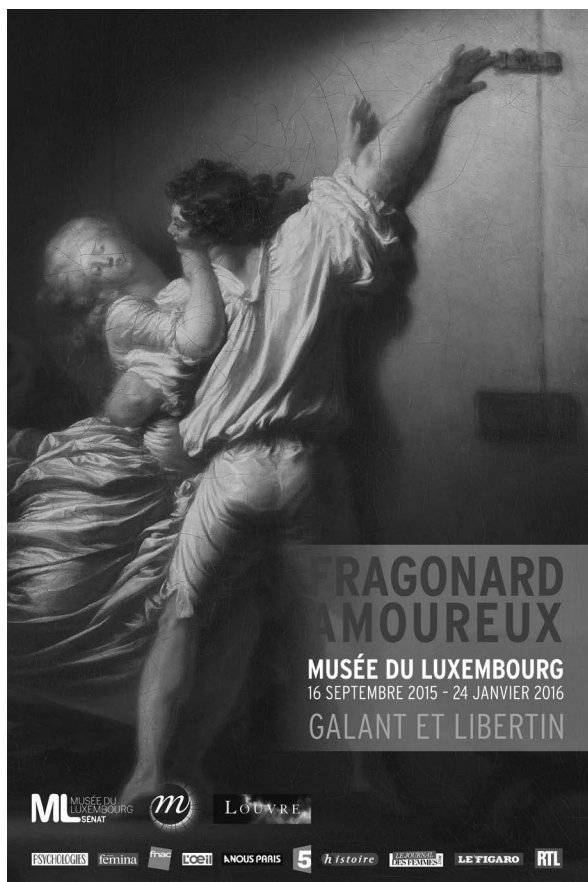


# FRAGONARD IN LOVE SUITOR AND LIBERTINE



  
English version

**FRAGONARD  
AMOUREUX**

**MUSÉE DU LUXEMBOURG**

16 SEPTEMBRE 2015 - 24 JANVIER 2016

**GALANT ET LIBERTIN**

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## INTRODUCTION

Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732-1806) is undoubtedly the most emblematic painter of the decades preceding the French Revolution. From landscapes to genre painting, historical painting, grand interior paintings and even portraits, he happily took to all styles; according to his first biographer, however, *"he was dedicated [above all] to the erotic genre with which he had great success"*. Indeed, the theme of love and romance is central to his works. Little is known about his personal life. It appears that his supposed liaisons with the famous courtesans of his time, such as Marie-Madeleine Guimard (1743-1816), were invented in the 19th century. According to the most reliable accounts, Fragonard was a good husband and a good father. His marriage, in 1769, to Marie-Anne Gérard (1745-1823) was a long and happy one. Like him, she was an artist, painting in miniature, and was from Grasse in the south of France. At the end of his career, in the 1780s, Fragonard worked with his young sister-in-law Marguerite Gérard (1761-1837), who went on to become a talented painter. No evidence has been found to suggest that they were lovers. The romantic ardour of "Frago", as he called himself, can be found elsewhere, in his work. As the Enlightenment accorded a new place to feelings and subjectivity, and the increasingly popular fledgling romantic genre put love at the heart of its stories, Fragonard used his pencils and canvases to develop a thousand variations on the sentiment, in line with the context of his era. It is the exploration of this theme of love and romance that we are going to pursue; from the last flames of gallant love and the triumph of libertinism, to the blossoming of a more sincere, sensitive and already "romantic" version of love.

## THE GALLANT SHEPHERD

A vestige of the so-called "Précieuses" (gatherings of intellectual society ladies to discuss the "questions of love", credited in part for establishing French literary classicism), poets and moralists of the "Grand Siècle", the concept of "galanterie", or gallantry, represented one of the values of French identity in the 18th century. *L'Astrée* (1607-1628), the great novel by Honoré d'Urfé (1567-1625) which narrates the utopian loves of the shepherds, imparted a sense of propriety to the topic until the 18th century. Without aiming to stifle the inclinations of feelings, "l'amour galant" advocated tenderness, sincerity, mutual respect and loyalty, all with absolute discretion. At the end of the 1730s, the painter François Boucher (1703-1770) became the inventor of a new iconography that combined the theme of love and romance with pastoral gallantry, taking particular inspiration from d'Urfé. It was in this school of painting that Fragonard, who was a pupil of Boucher in the early 1750s, undertook his first apprenticeship in romantic iconography. He brought with him, however, a more candid and sensual touch which would create a stir in Arcadia.

## THE LOVES OF THE GODS

Between 1740 and 1750, the mythological fables of Antiquity illustrated by François Boucher and his disciples became the symbol of a frivolous, even licentious, form of painting, as the Abbé Pluche wrote in 1739: *"The romances of Jupiter [are only painted] to fill our thoughts with pleasure [...] through a continual parade of libertine pursuits."* Since Regency (1715-1723), "libertinism" had triumphed among the elite by adopting the forms and the civilised veneer of gallantry, while in actual fact being a hedonistic quest for carnal pleasure that was completely detached from romantic sentiment. So-called "pleasure spaces", formal salons and even the décor for the bed-chamber of Louis XV at the Château de Marly were covered in romantic mythological paintings. It was in this school of painting that Fragonard trained. He produced his first sensual, decorative paintings under the influence of Boucher. During his time in Rome as a resident student at the Académie de France, between 1756 and 1761, he studied first hand the masterpieces of Antiquity. Upon his return, he created a magnificent series of etchings, the *Games of the Satyrs*, bringing antique art back to life in the most resolute manner. Eventually, in 1765, he became an eminent painter due to the success of *Coresus and Callirhoe*, a sombre mythological love story where simmering feelings coalesce with the tragedy of passion. Boucher's lesson had now been surpassed.

## RUSTIC AND POPULAR EROS

During his first trip to Rome (1756-1761) and, even more so, after his return, Fragonard renewed his approach to pastoral and popular love. This gave rise to two styles. First, a common, popular style that ostensibly represents carnal urges, with a directness that bordered on deliberate profanity. It comes from the literary genre of "poissard" (an often crude imitation of the lowest classes), which enjoyed great success in the 1740s. Established by the tales of the Comte de Caylus (1692-1765) and the comic operas of Jean-Joseph Vadé (1720-1757), the poissard genre has specific pictorial references, in particular the rustic scenes of 17th century Flemish painters such as David Teniers (1610-1690) and Rubens (1577-1640). Fragonard also drew inspiration from these sources. Playful and more than a touch salacious, what distinguishes "Frago" from his precursors is the lack of any scorn evoked in his representations of village love. Another style, more meditative and sentimental, marks the worship of nature established by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). *The Shepherd Playing a Flute*, undoubtedly exhibited at the 1765 Salon, demonstrates this poetical inspiration.

## FRAGONARD, ILLUSTRATOR OF LIBERTINE TALES

The 18th century represents the glory days of the illustrated book. Indeed, the middle of the century corresponds with a period where this genre flourished aesthetically and commercially. During the 1750s, it was the risqué and even licentious works that were met with the greatest success. Such was the case with the publishing of Jean de la Fontaine's *Contes* (Tales) (1621-1695), illustrated by Charles Eisen (1720-1778), in 1762, which was a real triumph. These debauched tales in no way share the same moralist inspiration as the famous *Fables*, and are considered to be one of the main sources of all libertine literature of the 18th century.

Fragonard no doubt studied the illustrations of the *Contes* at the end of his stay in Rome and during the 1760s, as the artist dedicated several series of drawings to the work. The largest, made up of fifty-seven pages, was the one assembled from the two albums conserved at the Petit-Palais and shown here. Thereafter, the project ended very much incomplete, with the publishing of the *Contes* overseen by Pierre Didot in 1795, of which only seventeen plates represent Fragonard's compositions. During the 1760s, Fragonard also began a series of isolated drawings illustrating a libertine tale, *The Queen of Golconde* by Stanislas de Boufflers (1738-1815), published in 1761. The project did not end in a printed book, and had little more success than any other of Fragonard's attempts in this genre.

## PIERRE-ANTOINE BAUDOUIN, A LIBERTINIST MASTER

During the 1760s, Fragonard appeared to be very close to the painter in miniature Pierre-Antoine Baudouin (1723-1769). A pupil of Boucher, Baudouin had become known for producing watercolour drawings whose subjects overlapped with those of libertine literature. His scenes of erotic seduction are close to those of the novels by Crébillon (1707-1777) or la Morlière (1719-1785), and even pornographic texts such as *Margot la Ravaudeuse* (1750).

The sudden success of these watercolours, exhibited to the public, was reinforced by the scandal they sometimes caused. His attendances at the Salons were hotly anticipated and the source of much critical commentary. Even freer compositions, by wealthy amateurs, were sometimes disseminated – though often toned down – through the process of engraving.

For Fragonard, Baudouin was undoubtedly a mentor in libertine iconography. From 1765, they shared the studio of the deceased painter Deshayes at the Louvre. In 1767, they were asked to reproduce the entire works of Rubens at the Palais du Luxembourg – the current Senate! At the time of Baudouin's premature death in 1769, the studio was full of Fragonard's drawings and paintings. Their works were so similar that some of Fragonard's libertine compositions appear to be an homage to his elder.

## FRAGONARD AND LICENTIOUS IMAGERY

From early Regency (1715-1723), a large portion of the French elite adopted "libertinism". This had a great deal of impact on literary and artistic circles. Sensual illustrated books and debauched engravings, disseminated clandestinely, had unprecedented success.. In addition, private spaces reserved for the enjoyment of pleasure appeared: the "boudoir", within the home, and the "petite maison"; residences built around the edge of the capital where, in the words of Crébillon, the "*libertine seeks to hide his weaknesses or his follies*". Painters, such as Jean-Baptiste Pater or François Boucher, often decorated these spaces. We even know that certain high-class brothels, such as the one run by Marguerite Gourdan on the rue Saint Sauveur in Paris, had a room of paintings and erotic prints. The origin of these works is still a secret. Very private orders, they arose from specific discussion between the painter and his commissioner. These were privileged people, such as financiers, aristocrats and, undoubtedly, courtesans. Between 1760 and 1770, "Frago" became the uncontested leader of this style.

*"I would paint with my arse."*

According to an account not revealed until 19th century, Fragonard once declared "*I would paint with my arse*". Indeed, with his very demonstrative and almost effusive style, the painter manages to confuse enthusiasm of artistic inspiration with that of erotic fusion. Through the fluidity of a wash drawing or the vigour of the widely impasted brush strokes, classed as "tartouillis" (clumsy and tasteless) by his detractors, Fragonard evokes at the paroxysmal confusion of emotions. He thus made use of all the suggestive power of his art to be able to trick the senses and glorify the imaginary.

## DANGEROUS READING

*"Never has a chaste girl read a novel",* declares Rousseau in the preface of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 1761

In the 18th century, reading became more widely adopted. Many social classes could therefore access means of knowledge that could cause established order to be called into question. Among the literary productions that inspired the most mistrust among authorities, the novel regularly provoked anathema and moral censorship. It was with this type of literature that Fragonard gladly associated. Representations of readers, female ones

especially, abound in his works. Numerous moralists condemned the corruptive influence of the novel on a female readership considered too sensitive and therefore vulnerable. Ambiguous, even frankly licentious representations flourished. However, literature was not the only corrupter of morals. Correspondence also developed considerably in the 18th century. A special type of literature, the epistolary novel, bears witness to this unprecedented rise evidenced by the greatest literary successes of the century, from *La Nouvelle Héloïse* by Rousseau in 1761 to *Dangerous Liaisons* by Choderlos de Laclos in 1782. Exchanges of correspondence appear in the works of Fragonard, undoubtedly with their own romantic and deliciously forbidden significance.

## THE REVIVAL OF THE "FÊTE GALANTE"

The years 1760 to 1780 witnessed a progressive decline in the values of libertinism. The considerable success of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) by Rousseau cemented the triumph of a form of moralist sentimentalism. In 1770, a disciple of Rousseau, Claude-Joseph Dorat (1734-1780), delivered a violent diatribe against libertinism. He countered it with a sincere and tender version of love. According to him, this love, which "*develops through respect*", grows from a retrospective look towards the gallant love and romance of the Grand Siècle: "*This business of tender sentiments, delicate care and veiled pleasure that the other century still recognised.*" Fragonard drew inspiration from this same "gallant" source to depict his intriguing *Music Lesson*, in which fancy costumes evoke the "Grand Siècle". But it was not until he met Antoine Watteau (1684-1721) that his art began to change direction. Fragonard revived the genre of "fêtes galantes", or courtship parties, that Watteau had invented, to the point of rediscovering his unique spirit which combined amused distance with suggested eroticism. This work of updating himself seems to have reached a peak of refinement and sophistication with the series *The Progress of love*, painted in 1771-1772 for the Comtesse Du Barry (1743-1793), the favourite of King Louis XV. To the evocation of these "fêtes galantes", Fragonard added the most modern and fragrant touches: the picturesque garden and the fashion for fairy tales. Chief among this style of work is the masterpiece *The Island of Love*, which irrevocably blends these two concepts in a fictional garden, a space with an enchanted eros.

## LOVE MORALISED

*Dangerous Liaisons*, a triumph in 1782, spelled the literary end of libertinism. In its place, a new and more socially appropriate mentality was established, which extolled the novel virtues of conjugal love.

The narrative creation of *The Bolt* appeared in this respect as a magnificent rewriting of erotic fantasy at the turn of the 1770s. First conceived as a piquant scene of libertine seduction, in the vein of Baudouin's watercolours, the painting was commissioned around 1777 by a distinguished patron, the Marquis de Véri (1722-1785). The art-lover suggested the problematic combination of *The Bolt* with a religious painting, *The Adoration of the Shepherds*, which Fragonard had just painted for him. Religious disrespect was no doubt visible through this combination which set sacred offerings against sexual pursuits.

*The Bolt* was made into an etching by Maurice Blot in 1784. Some years later, Blot produced another matching etching, based on a composition by Fragonard upon which he must undoubtedly have collaborated with Marguerite Gérard, *The Contract*. The work depicts a tender couple, unquestionably the same as in *The Bolt*, about to sign a promise of marriage. On the etching there appear very distinctly, hung on the wall, the two framed compositions of *The Wardrobe* - etched by Fragonard himself in 1778 - and *The Bolt*. The three works are therefore linked both formally and thematically. This concludes the narration - a moralising one - of *The Contract*, in the manner of "three chapters of a novel: 'fault' - *The Bolt* - surprised lovers - *The Wardrobe* - and the denouement - *The Contract*."

## HEROIC PASSION

*Orlando Furioso* and *Jerusalem Delivered* are among the most famous literary works of the Renaissance. They have never ceased to be thought of as unlimited sources of inspiration for artists, musicians, painters and writers alike. These two long poems appeared several decades apart, in the refined atmosphere of the court of the Este in Ferrara. Right up to his death, Ariosto (1474-1533) never ceased in his reworkings of *Orlando Furioso*. *La Gerusalemme Liberata* was published by the poet Tasso (1544-1595) in 1581. Though in different ways, both reinvented the story of the Crusades, mixing acts of war with romance and fantastical tales. Multiple editions of *Orlando Furioso* appeared in Europe during the Enlightenment. Fragonard was literally seized with passion for the epic poem, to the point of attempting to illustrate almost every scene. Although he was interrupted at the end of the sixteenth canto, this project produced around one hundred and eighty drawings. It is not known why, or for whom, this series was created. We can only situate it - through stylistic comparisons - at the end of the 1770s. This magnificent series of virtuosity attests to the artist's ability to translate into images a work as rich and complex as *Orlando Furioso*. The series marks a pinnacle in Fragonard's career, whereby passion and amorous misbehaviour, pushed to their zenith, are masterfully illustrated.

## ROMANTIC ALLEGORY

In 1773, the engraver Jean Massard gave Fragonard a copy of a collection of romantic poetry from Antiquity, attributed in particular to the poet Anacreon (582-485 B.C.), whose illustrations by Charles Eisen he had just engraved. This work, as well as another, *The Kisses* (1770), a collection of poems by Claude-Joseph Dorat and also illustrated by Charles Eisen, seem to have had a profound influence on Fragonard during the final decade of his artistic career. From the end of the 1770s, "Frago" produced a collection of allegorical romantic compositions, in a style inspired by Antiquity whose themes intersect with the antique romantic poetry known as "anacreontic": the fusion of romance and sexual enjoyment with nature of complicity. The painter uses the same metaphors as the poet, including the torch of love and the rose, the flower of Venus.

This was some of the last work produced by Fragonard, as the painter is thought to have put down his brushes around the start of the 1790s. "Frago" rejected the light-filled readability of his "neoclassical" contemporaries, instead plunging his images into the misty twilight of night and dreams.

At the start of the shift towards Romanticism, Fragonard subtly questioned the sincerity, reciprocity and durability of the sentiment of love. Thus *The Serment of Love*, *The Fountain of Love* and *The Vow to Love*.

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## TIMELINE

- 1732 Born in Grasse.
- around 1738 Family moves to Paris.
- around 1748-1752 Start of his training as a painter with Jean-Baptiste Chardin and then François Boucher.
- 1752 Wins the Grand Prix from the French Royal Academy of Painting.
- 1756-1761 Studies at the Académie de France in Rome.
- 1765 Accepted into the French Royal Academy of Painting. Exhibits his work for the first time at the Salon.
- 1767 Commission of *The Swing*.
- 1769 Marries Marie-Anne Gérard (1745-1823), 17 June; their daughter Rosalie is born on the 16 December.
- 1771-1772 Series of *The Progress of Love* for the pavilion of Madame Du Barry in Louveciennes. The collection is installed but almost immediately sent back to the painter.
- 1773-1774 Two long journeys accompanied by his patron Bergeret de Grandcourt, to Flanders and then to Italy.
- around 1775 Marguerite Gérard (1761-1837), youngest sister of Madame Fragonard, moves to Paris to live with the painter and his family. She becomes the pupil of his brother-in-law.
- around 1777 Paints *The Bolt* for the Marquis de Véri (1722-1785).
- 1780 Birth of his son, Alexandre-Évariste Fragonard, 26 October.
- 1788 Death of his daughter, Rosalie, 8 October. Fragonard is deeply affected by her death.
- 1790-1791 Travels to Grasse with his family. Gradually abandons painting.
- 1793 Permanent return to Paris.
- 1806 Death of Fragonard, 22 August, in his lodgings in the Palais Royal.

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### Exhibition opening times (16 September 2015 – 24 January 2016)

Open every day from 10 am to 7 pm.

Late opening on Mondays and Fridays until 9.30 pm.

Open from 10 am to 6 pm, Thursdays 24 and 31 December and Friday 1 January.

Closed exceptionally on Friday 25 December.

This exhibition is organised by the Réunion des musées nationaux – Grand Palais in partnership with the Musée du Louvre.



**Exhibition Curators:** Guillaume Faroult, Head Curator of the Department of Paintings at the Musée du Louvre, in charge of French 18<sup>th</sup> century painting, and British and American painting.

Set design: Jean-Julien Simonot

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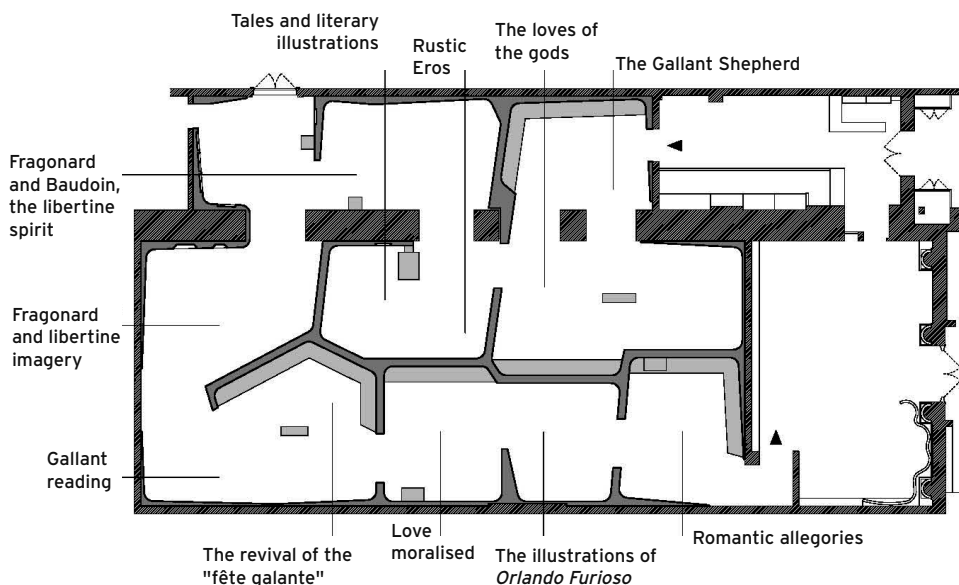
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# EXHIBITION MAP



## AROUND THE EXHIBITION

### PROGRAMME OF CONFERENCES AND ROUND TABLES

**Presentation of the exhibition** with curator Guillaume Faroult and set designer Jean-Julien Simonot, Tuesday 29 September at 6.30 pm

**Fragonard in his time** with Michel Delon, professor of 18th century French literature, Tuesday 6 October at 6.30 pm

**Libertinism today** with Aurélie Charon, producer at France Culture Wednesday 25 November at 6.30 pm

**Contemporary views of Fragonard** with Léa Bismuth, art critic, Dimitri Salmon, scientific coordinator at the Louvre's department of painting and Anne-Laure Sacriste, artist, Saturday 24 October at 3 pm

**Workshop day** "The use of the natural in the art and fashion of the 18th century", led by Pierre Rosenberg, art historian, 8 December



Free entry (booking required)

# AROUND THE EXHIBITION

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## CULTURAL EVENTS

**Nuit Blanche 2015 / Scented Night** with the Grasse Institute of Perfumery. Sensory tour of the exhibition, Saturday 3 October, 7.30 pm to midnight

**Sketchbook Evening**, Wednesday 18 November, 7 pm to 10 pm  
(art students, free upon reservation)

**Evening of licentious tales by Jean de La Fontaine**, Wednesday 20 January, 7 pm - 9.30 pm  
(students, free upon reservation)

**Performance** of Crébillon fils' *The Night and the Moment*, by Clément Hervieux-Léger from the Comédie-Française, Monday 18 January, 8 pm (Louvre auditorium)

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## MEDIATION ACTIVITIES

### Guided tour of the exhibition

Courting, spellbinding pleasure and the spiritual plenitude of shared love: explore all the facets of love and romance with Jean-Honoré Fragonard. Let yourself be guided by the artist's colourful masterpieces throughout the entire 18th century, from the last flames of Rococo to the first glimmers of Romanticism.

Daily tours at noon and evenings at 6.45 pm.

### Follow-up tour: colours and scents

Have you ever wondered what scent a work of art might have?

An original experience to enjoy individually or as a family, in partnership with the Grasse Musée International de la Parfumerie, Saturday 17 October, 28 November and 16 January (adult session: 11 am, family session: 2.30 pm)

### Audio-guide

A tour through the exhibition via 20 key works that demonstrate Fragonard, his significant encounters with some of his contemporaries, and the emergence of the theme of love and its evolution, from libertine scenes to neoclassical allegories.

Tour available in French, English, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian and Japanese

Full price: €4 ; concessions: €3 ; app: €2.99

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## MULTIMEDIA

### The "Petit Dictionnaire Fragonard" e-album

Price: €3.99 for tablets. Available in the App Store and Google Play.

### The exhibition film: Fragonard, the scales of love

On France 5, on DVD, video and VoD (Pluzzvad and iTunes). Directed by Jean-Paul Fargier - 52 minutes. Joint production - Mat productions/Rmn-GP in partnership with France Télévisions.

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## PUBLICATIONS

**Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux - Grand Palais, 2015**

- Exhibition catalogue, €39
- Exhibition album, €10
- Fragonard, Petit dictionnaire €12



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