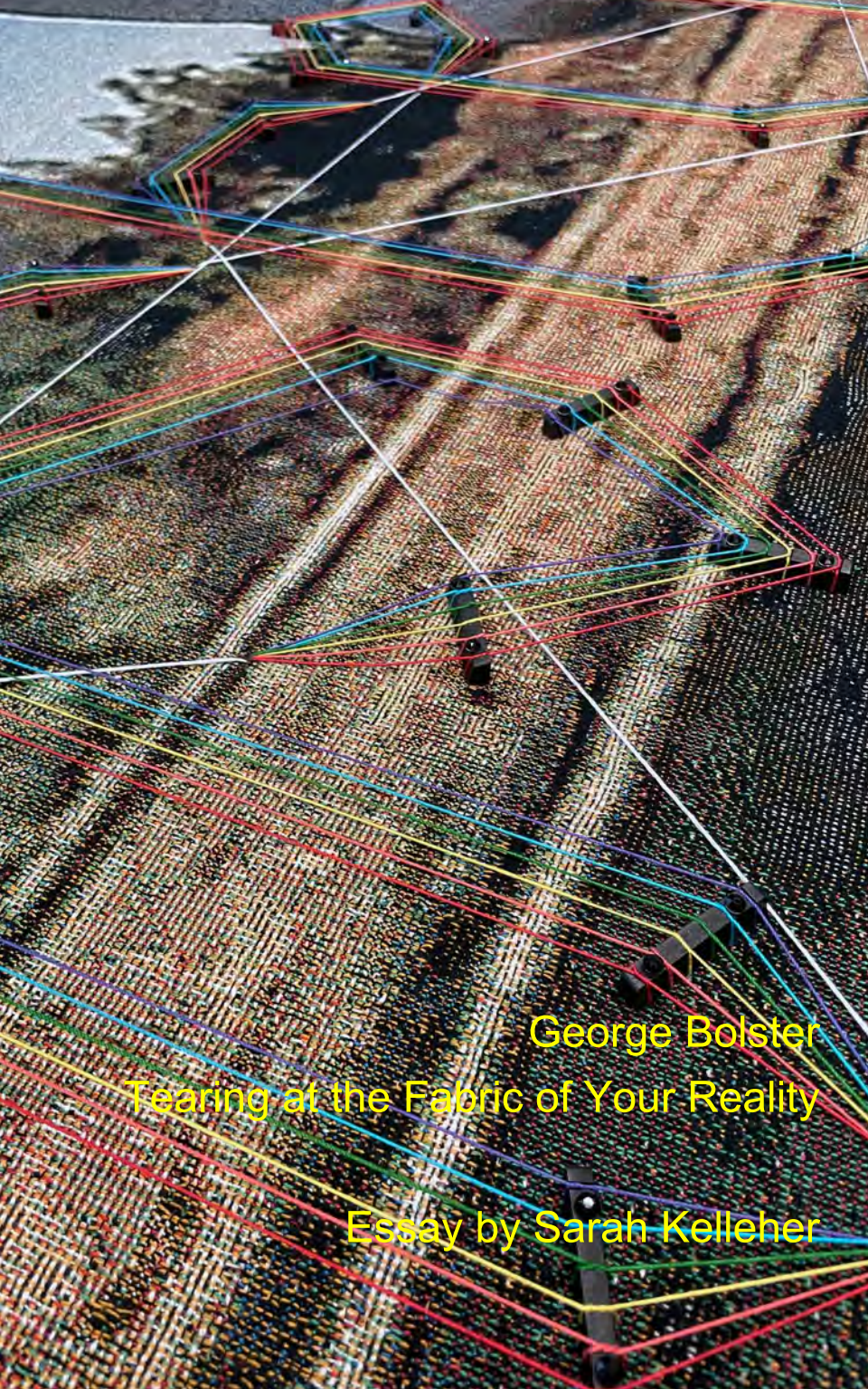


George Bolster
Tearing at the Fabric of Your Reality



George Bolster
Tearing at the Fabric of Your Reality

Essay by Sarah Kelleher



(cover and title page image detail)

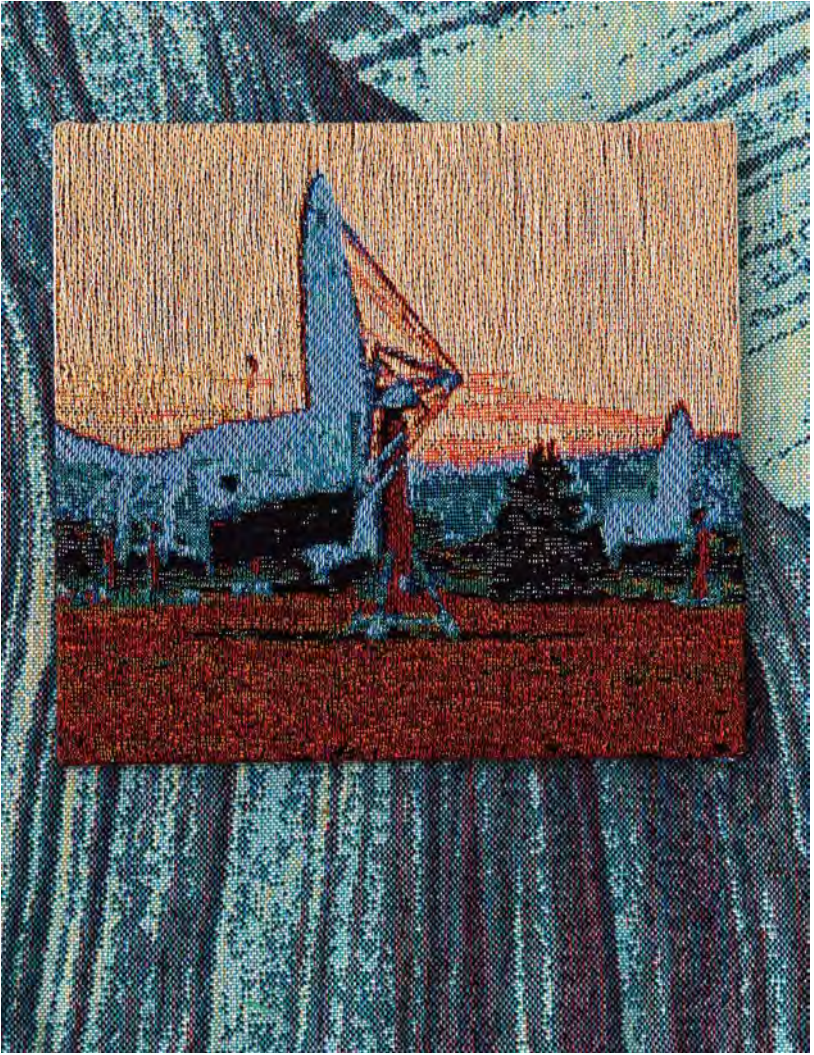
Mathematics as the Instrument of the Heavens, of a Universal Search for Life (2021)

Jacquard tapestry, thread, swarovski crystal, ceramic

The Epic Territories of the now Unprotected Sublime latterly titled American (2020)

Jacquard tapestry (installation shot with other works)





Life on Other Planets: Their Quest to Find Us (2020)

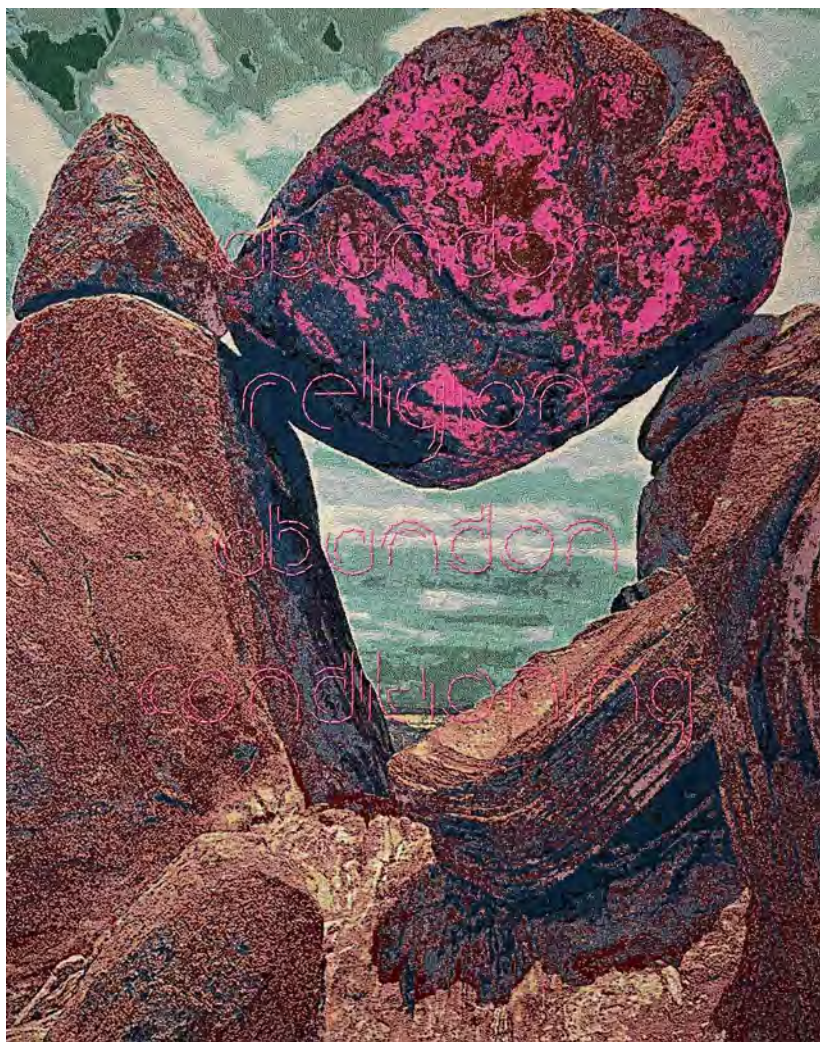
Debroidery, elements removed from jacquard tapestry (installation shot with other works)

(facing page)

The Epic Territories of the now Unprotected Sublime latterly titled American (2020)

Jacquard tapestry (installation shot with other works)





A Balance We Need to Strike: Allowing the Next Generation to Live in the Past Perpetuates the Present Stasis (2021)

Digital painting, acrylic paint and embroidery on jacquard tapestry



abandon

religion

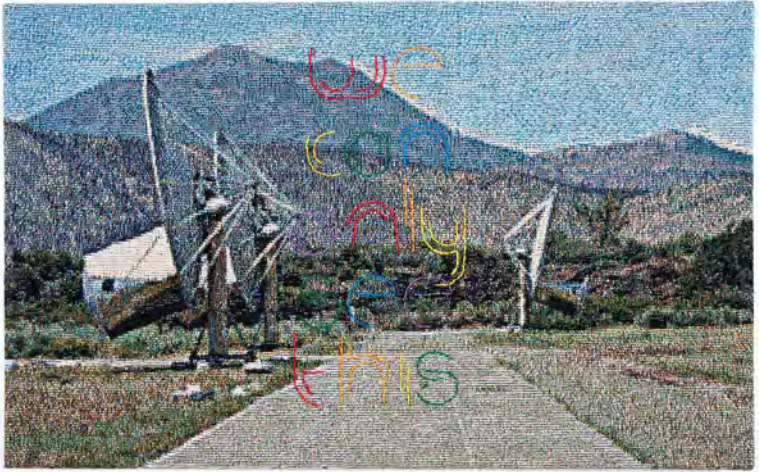
abandon

conditioning

George Bolster - All Images are Information.

Everything you See, Hear, or Say is a Wave presents a grainy rendering of two pale, nested discs that radiate fine, colored rays. The granular quality of the image abrades the contours, the lip of the disc a fraying, pixelated edge, which bleeds into the peachy cloudscape behind. The composition gradually resolves as the parabolic dish of a huge antenna set against a rosy sky and a rust colored landscape. The impression of pixelation is not a consequence of digital imaging, but an effect of the warp and weft of a jacquard weave. Loops of thread create passages of textural density, in some places pulled taut, in others pulled out from the matrix to reveal colors hidden in the depth of the fabric.

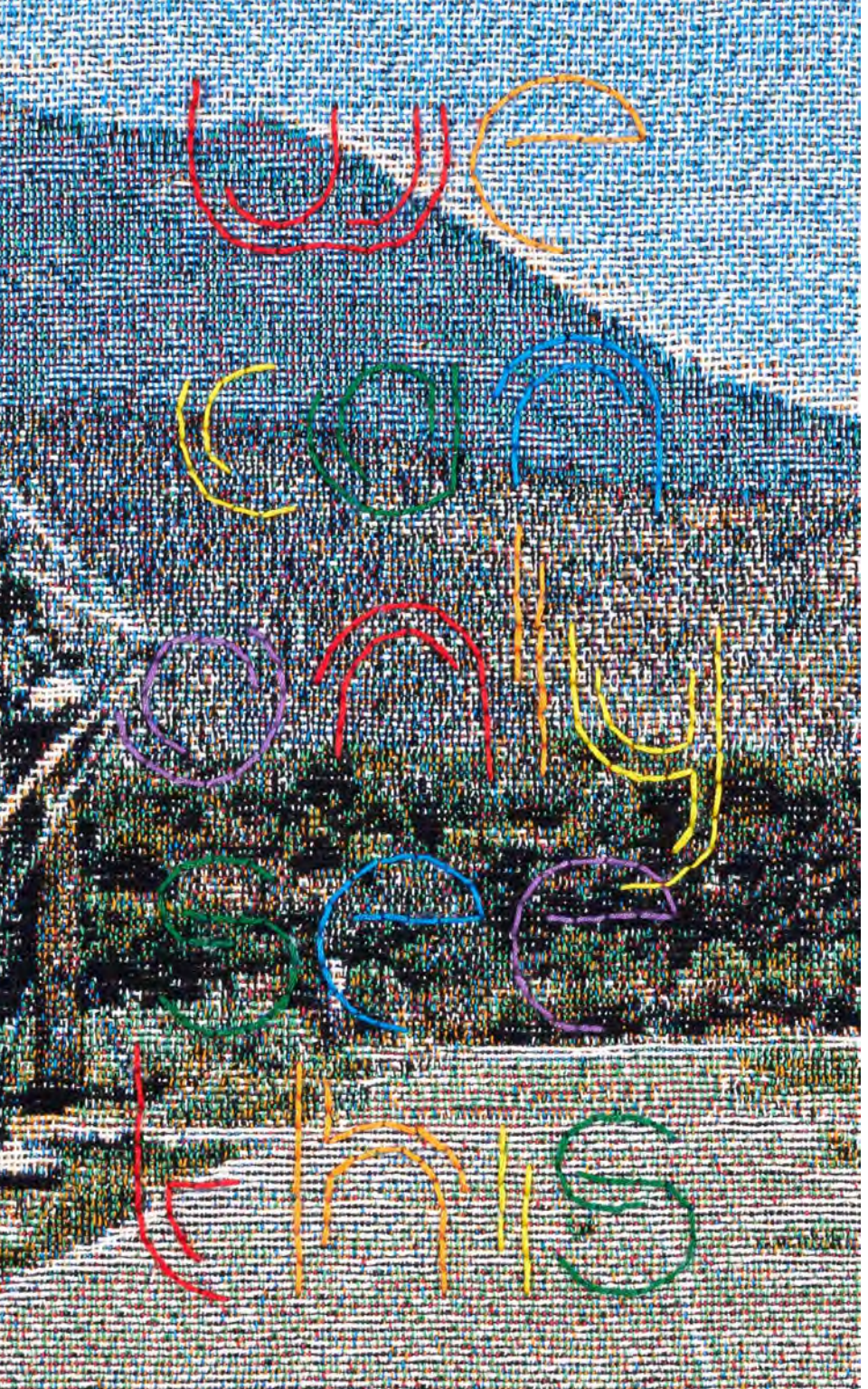
The work is one of a series by multi-disciplinary Irish artist George Bolster which translate images of the Allen Telescope Array into jacquard, a machine woven textile. Located in the Hat Creek Observatory, in the Cascade Mountains, 300 km outside San Francisco, the Allen Telescope Array is a forty two dish radio telescope that operates like a snapshot camera rapidly surveying large swathes of sky. It is looking for evidence of life on other planets. Through-out this body of work, Bolster dwells on the distinctive shape of the antennae and their desert setting set against sublime cloudscaapes dappled with multiple moons. *Visible and Invisible Simultaneity* for example, presents a trio of the telescopes in profile against a sky stippled with a constellation of pale planets. In *Voyaging: Intergalactic Diplomacy*, a linear rendering of an antenna in multicolored stitch floats against a sky crossed by intersecting rainbows. The double rainbows make reference to Kepler 16b, a planet discovered by Laurence Doyle and his team of researchers. Kepler 16b is 200 light years from Earth and is orbited by two stars.



It is a real life Tatoonie.

This work stems from a residency Bolster undertook at the SETI Institute in 2016, which drew together his interest in science, art history and other contested bodies of knowledge in the context of the climate crisis. An offshoot of NASA dedicated to the Search for Extra Terrestrial Intelligence, SETI is a stereo scientific project that since 1984 has been working to find signals, either aural or visual that might point to a technological civilization on another planet, in another galaxy. So far, this endeavor has not been fulfilled, however researchers from many disciplines continue to collaborate, scanning the sky for information, for waves of sound or light that might indicate other forms of life in the universe.

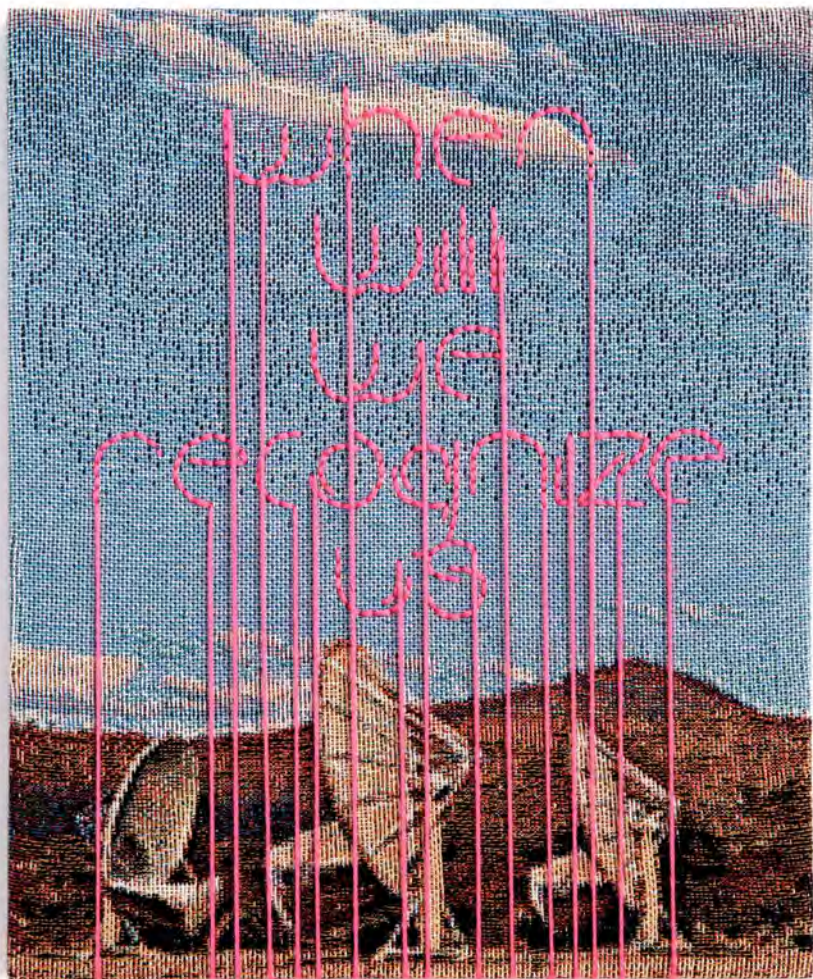
So how do stitch and cutting edge astrophysics relate to each other? How does the materiality of jacquard signify in our age of virtuality? Textiles and texts, as Roland Barthes reminds us, share an etymological root, deriving from the Latin *texere* - to weave.¹ As such, textiles offer themselves as objects replete with information, dense with multiple meanings and open to a range of conflicting



interpretations.² Bolster works with jacquard because it offers a uniquely effective analog for information processing and activates a constellation of meanings and histories. A machine woven textile which originated in 18th Century France, the technique uses a series of punch cards to guide the loom, and made it possible for unskilled workers to fabricate intricate, complex patterns in a fraction of the time of a traditional weaver and assistant. Crucially, this punch card design would go on to inform the development of early computers, as well as binary code. As such, jacquard is central to the development of information technology, and to both the birth of industrial capitalism and to organized resistance against its ruthless systems of production.³

Bolster leverages this technique to connect with a history of information systems, but also, in a deft conceptual move, to tap into the long relationship between textiles and their role in agitational actions and anti-authoritarian protest cultures.⁴ The nostalgic color palette of sun soaked pastels and the retro-futuristic aesthetic of huge telescopes, vast celestial expanses and rainbow colored text, makes reference to the specific historical and cultural moment of the 1960s, an age of space exploration, technological confidence, counter culture and a burgeoning environmental movement. Indeed both the space missions and the serious anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-capitalist politics of protest in the 1960s stem from this shared optimistic position. Exploration, like, protest, is an inherently positive and courageous enterprise, both springing from the belief that things can change, that we can and will do better, that we will exceed our limitations.

There is something deeply poignant about looking back at this moment of positivity and social progressiveness from our current vantage point, colored by pervasive anxiety around climate collapse and increasingly retrograde, isolationist politics. However, Bolster's work positions SETI's mission as stemming from this same deeply humane optimism. Whereas the space race of the 1960s was bound



(previous two pages, full and detail)

Seeing Determined by Evolution: a Fraction of the Electromagnetic Spectrum (2020)

Embroidery on jacquard tapestry

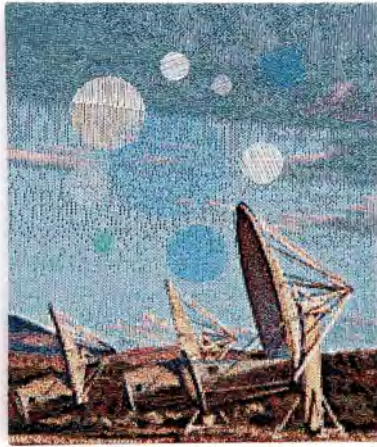
The Human to Human Flaw (2019)

Embroidery on jacquard tapestry

(facing page)

Visible and Invisible Simultaneity (2020)

Embroidery and debroidery on jacquard tapestry

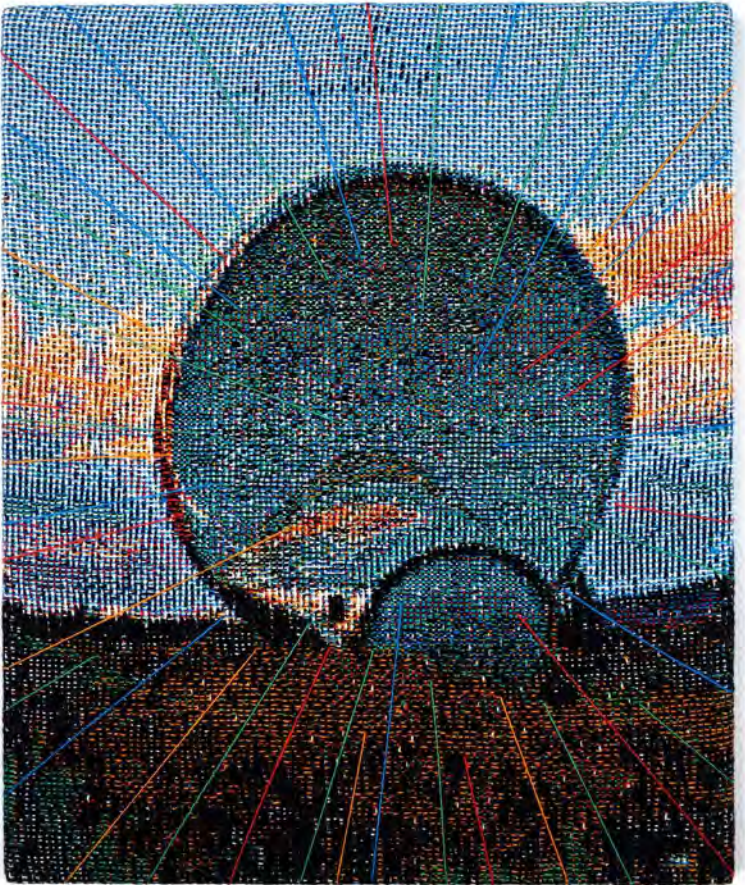


up with Cold War politics and, as Carl Sagan reminds us, was less about science than it was about ideological confrontation, the SETI project is a purely scientific endeavor, one based on sharing and building on knowledge.⁵ Rather than the race to plant a flag on the moon, SETI's outward looking goal asks bigger questions about our relationship to the planet, and to our place in the universe, by displacing the human as the arbiter and measure of intelligence. In *Seeing Determined by Evolution: a Fraction of the Electromagnetic Spectrum*, Bolster overlays the antennae and their mountain backdrop with the succinct reminder that 'we can only see this' embroidered in the seven colors of the electromagnetic spectrum that are visible to humans. SETI's research reminds us, in Bolster's words, and that we need to be 'less parochial' in our thinking. In order to attend to potential aural or visual signals generated by extraterrestrial life, SETI researchers have to exceed our perceptual restrictions, in acknowledgment of the fact that humans are blind to most of the light in the universe.

Interest in the extraterrestrial is always shaped by an attitude toward the terrestrial. The U.S. human space flight program was marked by a particularly American rhetoric of manifest destiny, frontier conquest and exploitation.⁶ Doom-and-gloom Cold War visions framed space travel as a necessity for survival in an apocalyptic age in which

humanity was considered to be teetering on the brink of nuclear self-immolation, and persists these days in commercial New Spacers' motivations for designing "exit strategies" for leaving a ruined Earth.⁷ More recent environmentalist attitudes, galvanized by the space missions of the 1960s and '70s, take Earth as the only planet we have, one we must steward and protect. Photographic images that looked back to the Earth from space underscored both the unity and the fragility of the planet as a whole. Rather than acting as an icon of the magnificent technological achievements of the space program, the "blue marble" photograph taken on the last Apollo mission became the most powerful symbol of our need to protect the Earth's finite resources and complex ecological systems.⁸

At present, scientists looking for life on Mars scout for microbes analogous to those archaeobacteria on Earth that live in such sites as deep-sea hydrothermal vents. That project has the ricochet effect of making portions of Earth into analogs for other worlds: turning parts of the Utah desert into Mars.⁹ In an installation for NADA Miami in 2020, Bolster mounted his small textile works on a monumental jacquard tapestry, twenty eight foot long. Initially an abstract image composed of whorls of blue and jade green with patches of terracotta, it resolves as a vast desert rock formation, its colors reversed and made alien. *The Epic Territories of the Now Unprotected Sublime, Latterly Titled American* is a portion of a vast desert landscape cast in negative colors, it references the fact that the Trump administration decommissioned nine national monuments, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation. The sublime landscape is a double edged concept, it speaks to the shuddering aesthetic pleasure in confronting a natural phenomenon that dwarfs human scale, but, as art historian Roger Hull reminds us, the sublime landscape as a specifically American category of painting, did not develop until nature began to be understood as endangered.¹⁰ Just as the view from Apollo brought home to us that beauty and fragility of our planet floating in the empty darkness of space, Bolster's epic landscape cast in reverse, speaks to the iconic



Everything You See, Hear, or Say is a Wave (2020)
Embroidery on jacquard tapestry

topography of the American West under threat from extractive capitalism.

To use jacquard to realize these images of the earthly and celestial sublime is to give texture to complex, interwoven ideas of exploration, climate crisis, the nature of life on Earth and the potential of life in space. It is also to refuse easy binaries and to acknowledge competing positions of anxiety and optimism. Bolster's work is dense with meaning and provocation, shot through with layers of significance that are inextricably linked to the materiality of his medium. To borrow from art historian Julia Bryan Wilson's words, Bolster's jacquard pieces warp between the past and the present: recruited for pressing contemporary concerns, they also pull us back to contentious histories and veer towards imagined futures.¹¹ These works also celebrate the fact that, at a moment where we seem to be increasingly fearful and inward looking, there are people still looking outward, the better to show us to ourselves.

Essay by Sarah Kelleher

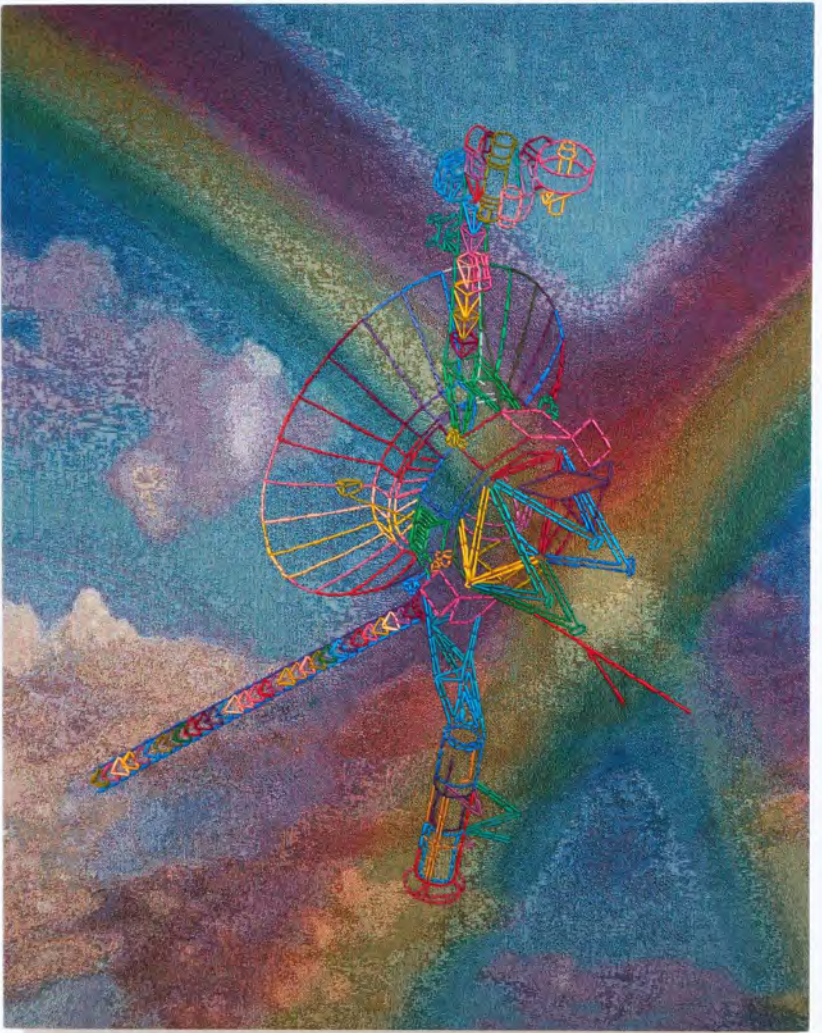


End Notes

1. Roland Barthes, "Analyse textuelle d'un conte d'Edgar Poe," in *Sémiotique narrative et textuelle*, ed. Claude Chabrol (Paris: Larousse, 1973), 29–54
2. Julia Bryan Wilson, *Fray: Art and Textile Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. 4
3. Some of the first acts of workplace sabotage took place when textile workers—mostly men but also women—of early nineteenth-century England destroyed mechanical looms in the beginning moments of the Industrial Revolution, Bryan Wilson, *Fray*, p. 7
4. Bryan Wilson, *Fray*, p. 3
5. Carl Sagan, *Pale Blue Dot: Visions of a Human Future in Space* (New York Ballantine Books, 1997)
6. Linda Billings, 'Space Cowboys: How Jingoism Corrupts American Rhetoric on Space Flight', *Scientific American* (2015), p. 12
7. Stefan Helmreich, 'Extraterrestrial Relativism', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 85:4 (2012), pp. 1125-1139, p.1132
8. Sagan, *Pale Blue Dot*
9. Helmreich, 'Extraterrestrial Relativism' 1133
10. Roger Hull, 'American Sublime Landscape painting in the United States, 1820–1880' (Tate: London, 2002), p. 3
11. Bryan Wilson, *Fray*, p. 261

Writer Biography

Sarah Kelleher is an independent arts writer and curator based in Cork, Ireland, and is currently completing a PhD on contemporary Irish sculpture in the History of Art department at University College Cork. Kelleher is a member of AICA (International Association of Art Critics) and has written catalog essays for the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin and the Limerick City Art Gallery, as well as publishing academic articles on Japanese photography and on Dada sculpture and performance. In 2014, with Dr. Rachel Warriner, Kelleher founded Pluck Projects, an independent curatorial venture working with experimental Irish practitioners.



Voyaging: Intergalactic Diplomacy (2020)
Embroidered wool on jacquard tapestry
(detail previous page)



Embrace the Human (2020)

Text on this tapestry reads "abandon nationalism, abandon tribalism, abandon terracentrism"

Embroidered wool on jacquard tapestry

(facing page)

Looking Further: The Search for Life on Other Planets (2020)

Embroidered wool on jacquard tapestry









Mathematics as the Instrument of the Heavens, of a Universal Search for Life (2021)
Jacquard tapestry, thread, swarovski crystal, ceramic
(detail previous page)

(next four pages)

The Double Rainbows of Tatoonie (Kepler 16b): Truncated Timelines Inhibit Our Understanding of Who, Where, and Why We Are (2021)
Jacquard Tapestry











Artist Biography

(b. 1972, Ireland)

Lives and works in New York City, NY, USA

Education

- 1999 MA Fine Art, Central Saint Martins, London, UK
1997 BA(Hons) Painting, Chelsea College of Art and Design, London, UK

Selected Solo

- 2021 *Imminent Archive*, Rule Gallery, Marfa, Texas, USA (two person)
2020 *NADA Miami*, Solo Presentation, Ulterior Gallery, NYC, NY, USA
Tearing at the Fabric of Your Reality, Ulterior Gallery, NYC, USA
You Are Made of Stardust, Solstice Arts Center, Meath, IRL
New Viewings, Barbara Thumm Gallery, Berlin, Germany
2019 *Tatooine: Sci-Fi Becoming Reality*, Sirius Arts Center, Cork, IRL
2018 *Towards a Universal Sublime*, Galeria HIT, Bratislava, Slovakia
2015 *Amazement Insulates Us All/Memento Vivere*, The Lab Gallery, Dublin, IRL
2014 *Un/natural History: Drowning Captiva*, La Nuit Blanche, Toronto, Canada
2013 *Future Imperfect (part 3)*, Monster Truck Gallery, Dublin, IRL
2010 *Sociodesic: a space for the three great loves*, GAC, Galway, IRL
2009 *High on Christ*, Chung King Project, Los Angeles, CA, USA
2008 *Chiesa Dei Miracoli*, Triskel Arts Center, Cork City, IRL
United in Suffering, Belltable Arts Center, Limerick, IRL
2005 *Eye of the Needle*, Pallas Heights Gallery, Dublin, IRL

Selected Group

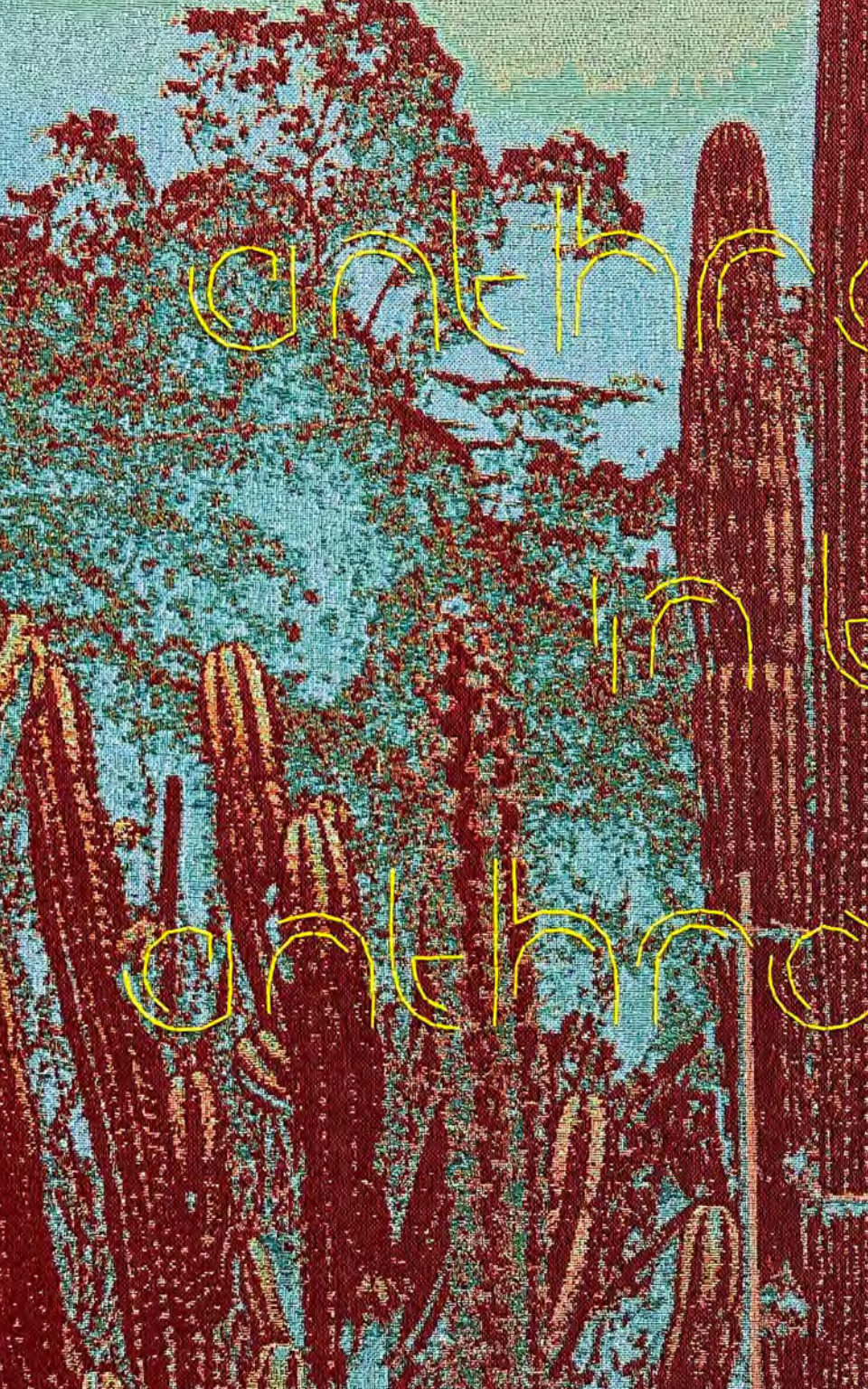
- 2021 *Woman in the Machine*, VISUAL Carlow/Carlow Arts Festival, Carlow, IRL
The Space We Occupy, Irish Arts Center, NYC, USA
2019 *Traveling to the End*, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, Gwacheon-si, Korea
2018 *Elsewhere*, Ulterior Gallery, NY, NY, USA
In the Future, Collyer Bristow Gallery, London, UK
Seven Senses, Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, New York, NY, USA
2017 *We Need to Talk...*, Petzel, New York, NY, USA
2016 *Making Contact*, NUMU, New Museum, Los Gatos, CA, USA
Et si on s'était trompé?, FE McWilliam Gallery, Down, Northern IRL
Kenosis in the Supervoid, Station Independent, New York, NYC, USA
2015 *SEACHANGE Tulca*, Festival of Visual Arts, Galway City, IRL
Et si on s'était trompé?, Centre Culturel Irlandais, Paris, France
2014 */Seconds*, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

- Irish Art Does Not Exist*, Station Independent, New York, NY, USA
- 2011 *Drawing Biennial*, Drawing Room, London, UK
- 2009 *Drawing Biennial*, The Drawing Room, London, UK
These Days: Elegies for Modern Times, Mass MoCA,
North Adams, MA, USA
- 2008 *Darkness Visible*, Galway Arts Centre, Ireland; LCGA, Limerick, IRL
- 2007 *Urban Gothic*, Café Gallery Projects at Dilston Grove, London, UK
- 2006 *Flip*, Chung King Projects, Los Angeles, CA, USA





A Cosmic Pairing: In Intergalactic Diplomacy What Do We Share to Communicate Us (2021)
Embroidery and debroidery on jacquard tapestry
(detail on facing page)



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anthropocene



Anthropause in the Anthropocene (2020)
Jacquard tapestry, thread, swarovski crystal, ceramic
(detail previous page)

George Bolster: Tearing at the Fabric of Your Reality is published on the occasion of his exhibition *Tearing at the Fabric of Your Reality*, 2020; his installation at NADA Miami 2020; and subsequent solo presentation at The Armory Show, NYC, 2021 in the Focus section curated by Wassan Al-Khudhairi.

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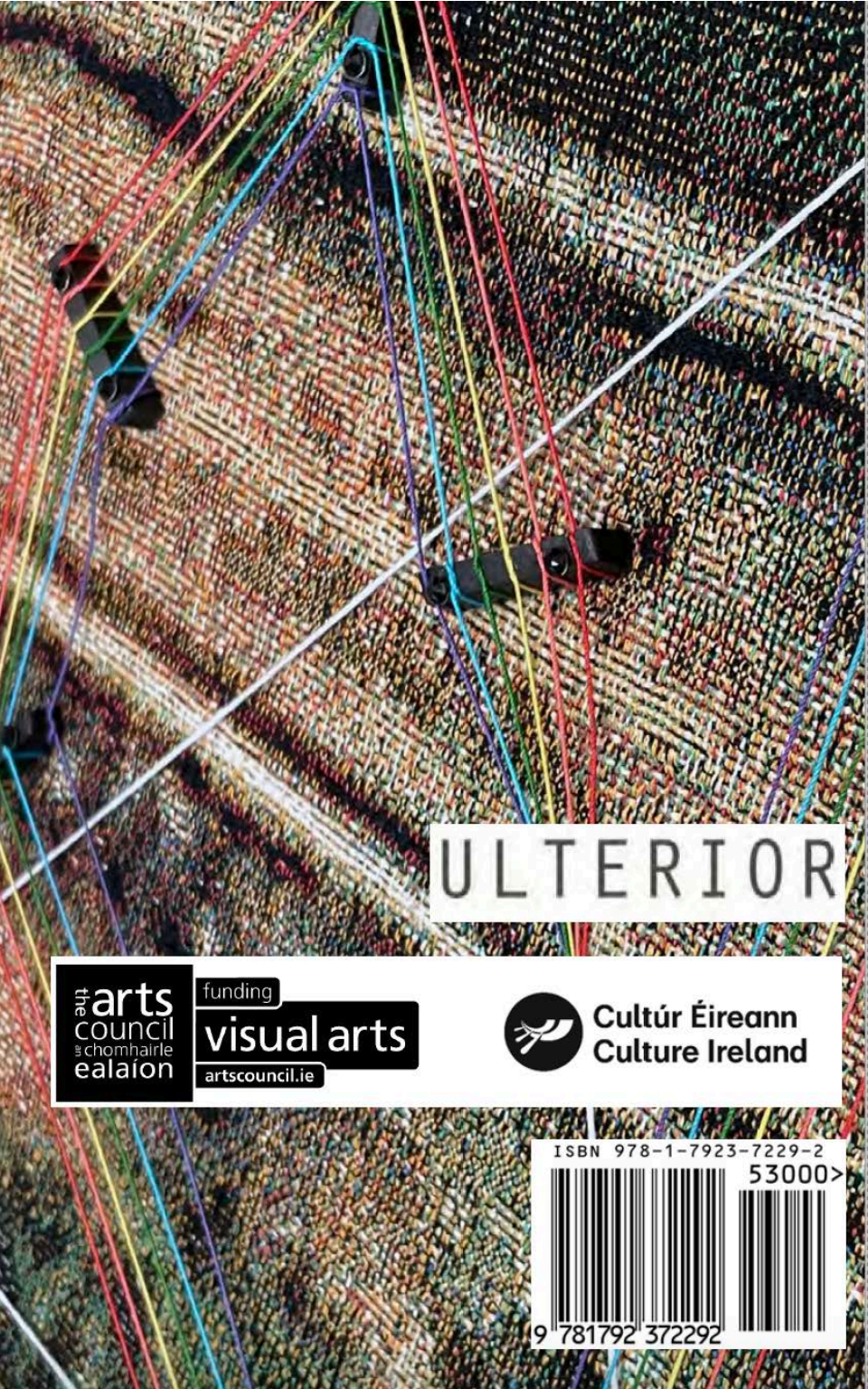
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You Live in a Reality of Four Thousand Planets: Plan the Infinity of Our Species (2021)
Debroidery on jacquard tapestry



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