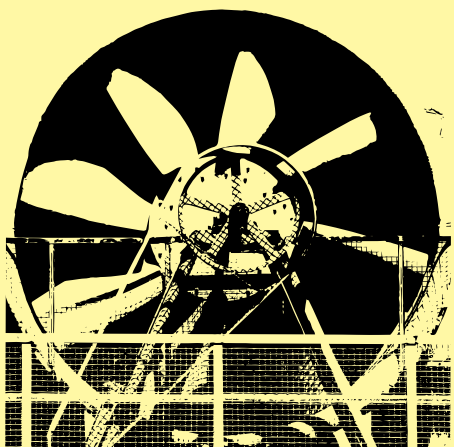
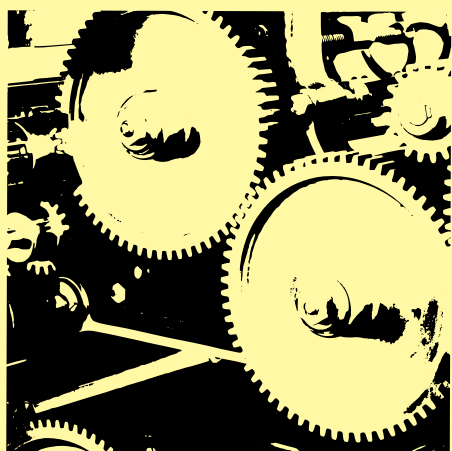
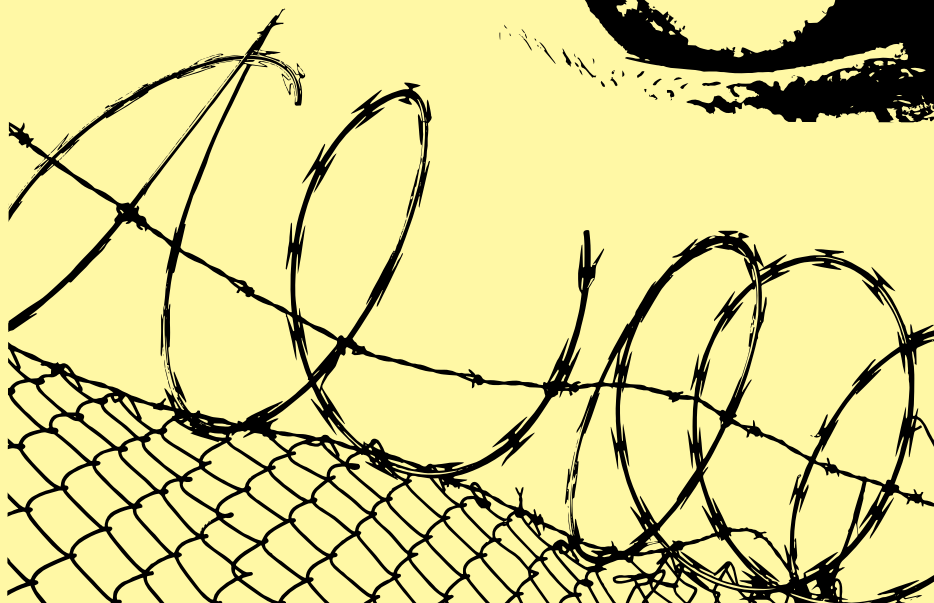


艺术界

LEAP



劳动时间
WORK TIME

HKD 120 | RMB 100 | TWD 480
USD 20 | EUR 18 | GBP 15

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郑确：劳改三部曲之 “足疗”与“厂妹”

Zheng Que: “Foot Massage” and “Factory Girl”



《劳动记录 / 2：贴标签》(静帧)
行为录像，3840 × 2160 像素、彩色、有声
劳动时长：4.5 小时，劳动日期：2023 年 7 月 17 日

Labor Record/2: Labeling (Still)
Performance video, 3840 × 2160 pixels, color, sound
Labor duration: 4.5 hours, Labor date: 17 July 2023
All images courtesy the artist

采访：聂小依
Interview by Nie Xiaoyi

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2022 年起，郑确开启了“劳改三部曲”的创作，她将“劳动”视作一种改造艺术生产的方式，将“艺术家”视作一种中转身份，试图用劳动生产经验覆盖艺术生产经验。她目前完成了前两部“足疗”和“厂妹”。在“足疗”中，她学习足部按摩技法，以“上钟”的时长、足疗的手法去做泥塑。随着她积累更多的足疗经验，她手中的每一件雕塑也逐渐变化。而在 2023 年开始的“厂妹”中，她在 7、8、9 月（外贸季）前往金华市磐安县的一个节日礼品装饰制品厂工作，轮流从事这条生产流水线上的全部工种：裁剪、缝纫、钉补、质检、包装等等。这个工厂主要外销复活节帽、万圣节服饰、圣诞帽、圣诞袜等节庆产品，在这三个月中，她的作品以小商品的形式流入了西方市场。

郑确的“劳改三部曲”还未公开展示过，但她已经设想了自己的未来的展览。她并非只是在对“劳动”感兴趣，更切身的是作为艺术家的她、接受过艺术教育的她、正在艺术学院读书的她、已经踏入艺术行业的她，需要劳动，需要艺术之外的社会，来面对给她带来种种困惑和问题的“艺术”。虽然动用了“劳改”这个带着深重历史时期意涵的词汇，但她并没有太引申至 20 世纪下半叶知识分子所经历的“洗澡”“割尾巴”“劳改”，反而回到了一个朴素的问题，劳动能给人带来什么，又会给艺术带来什么？

LEAP 我一开始是被“劳改”这个字眼吸引住的，本来“劳改”指的是知识分子要去被改造，但你改造的是艺术。为什么你觉得艺术需要被改造？

郑确 “劳改”（“劳动改造”的缩写）一词在建国初期是指向反革命分子及知识分子，改革开放后成为一种针对罪犯的刑罚执行制度，尽管前者带有特殊的阶级身份标签，实际上这一词汇的隐含核心是“赎罪”，将罪犯置身于特定的生产关系之下，旨在让其在劳动中改造自己，成为新人。我挪用这个词汇作为整个三部曲的标题是由于首先它能贴切地概括我的项目主旨，其次它在中文语境中的批判性意味无需多言，并且“劳动改造”是一个偏正结构，“改造”作为中心词所指向的既是我的困境，也是我感到艺术目前所存在的困境。

我觉得艺术需要被改造，是因为当代艺术在某种程度上已经陷入了自我封闭的语境。它在白盒子空间中自说自话，远离了更广泛的社会现实和普通人的生活经验。那种有点孤芳自赏的傲慢让它被呈现于一种真空的状态下，处于某种类似“鬼打墙”的困境中。我自己的身上也存在同样的困境，都市生活所带来的真空感，

或者如社会学家项飏所说的“悬浮”，令我常常怀疑自己的思考和表达在客观层面上是否存在价值，我感到自己似乎在旁观生活，而不是切实地生活。我想寻求改变，踏踏实实地做些实事，踏踏实实地生活，我不想成为随波逐流的飘萍，也不希望艺术仅仅成为一种正在落伍的点缀。

但是，“改造艺术”是一个很宏大的愿景，尽管在项目主旨上我流露出了这样的野心，但我没有相匹配的实力去改造如此庞杂的系统。因此，我只是从自己出发，劳动首先改造了我、重塑了我，然后自然地改造了我的艺术生产方式。身体劳动这种带有些痛感的改造不至于让个体化的表达成为一种唠叨。以“我”为例，也能够更实在地说明“改造”的力量，为艺术提供一种警觉的可能。

“改造”，既不是放弃，也不是妥协，而是一种带有乐观色彩的拯救。我喜欢这种看起来有点天真的乐观，包含了许多的希望和期盼。同时，其中也存在着与词汇原意相匹配的关于“赎罪”的隐喻，通过身体劳动赎回艺术和生活的真实。

LEAP 改造艺术的方法——劳动，一开始是怎么进入的你的视野的？

郑确 我发现长期依赖脑力劳动的工作者可能会面临一种共同的问题：精力过剩带来的胡思乱想。我的脑子里总是有纷飞的思绪。它们像是一团会生长的乱麻，在任何时候都会突然地占据我，只有身体动起来的时候，才能让这些念头停一停。并且，我本身可能也有点像狗，每天都要保证一定的运动量去消耗过剩的精力，不然晚上就会兴奋的失眠。因此，当我想要改造现状，让身心专注于某种实在的时候，身体消耗是一条必然途径。而劳动可以让工作和生产变得很实在，可以抵抗追求意义的虚无，同时让身体清晰且具体地显现其自身，从囿图中亮相。

选择“劳动”还有一个原因是，同样都是劳动，脑力劳动的社会地位在舆论中总是优于体力劳动，更别提艺术总是被视为一种高端的精神活动了。但我不认为艺术家应该是一个特权化的、独立于社会的角色。博伊斯说：“人人都是艺术家。”但是在今天，“艺术家”是什么了不起的称号吗？我认为艺术生产和其他生产工作都处于同等的位置，艺术家可以是工人，可以是

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农民，可以在劳动中找到创造力和意义。甚至可以说，在体力劳动者被贬斥为“低端人口”的当下，我们应该为“劳动”正名，“劳动最光荣”不应该只是一句口号，而是一个事实。另外，小时候听家里人讲监狱里劳改要挖土方的事儿，挖一立方米的土方，再填平，再挖，有点像一种西西弗斯般的惩戒或者说修行。这个事儿我记了很多年，像是心底会时不时浮现的炎症。体力劳动好像总是和重复性挂钩，重复又似乎代表了无聊、乏味和无意义，但身体是格外诚实的，不同的劳作会在身上留下不同形状的肌肉和记忆，重复会带来一种身体的充盈，这一点也吸引了我。

LEAP 做这个项目和你的学习雕塑的经历有关系吗，因为在我的刻板印象里，雕塑的确是需要用身体应对大体量的材料的媒介。

郑确 强烈相关，首先项目最初的灵感就开始于一个玩笑，有一段时间经济状况不好，接不到什么活儿，同室友聊天的时候我开玩笑说：做艺术听起来体面，但是捏雕塑和捏脚没啥区别，可能还没人家挣得多呢。从这个玩笑开始，我逐渐发展出整个项目的结构，以身体劳动作为核心，以艺术的中转作用作为抓手——我觉得艺术很灵活，像一个旋转门，任何东西进来出去都可以。事实上，三部曲中的前两部“足疗”和“厂妹”都和雕塑相关。足疗和雕塑都与手的尺度有关，而我选择的工厂则是面料礼品加工厂，表面粘贴与加工等方式也都是我在上学时就熟悉的。

尽管我现在的作品经常以行为、影像、文字和装置等方式呈现，但我的思维方式是基于一种雕塑思维，重视力的作用和反作用。我所强调的三个作品关键词：空间、本土和幽默，也是从雕塑中生长出来的。“空间”是第一个词，这是我作品里始终关注的核心问题。雕塑总是以结果呈现自身，但对于创作者而言其过程是格外具体和实在的身体劳动，导致我对身体在场有一种亲切的依恋，对过程性的东西也有一种执着和痴迷。

LEAP 你目前完成了“劳改三部曲”的前两部。选择按摩店和小商品工厂打工，显然带有阶级性，这是跟你的成长经验有关吗？

郑确 这是最难回答的一个问题。首先我选择足疗和

工厂完全是出于作品主旨及结构的需要，阶级性并不是我的第一考量标准。这与我的成长经验无关，看起来似乎是某种背离自己，但如果我是将“阶级性”和“背离”作为要点来做作品的话，那我应该会选择更符合文艺叙事下刻板印象的工厂才能实现我的目的。我们厂并没有那么多的苦难可以叙述，厂子坐落于江浙沪地区，工人基本是本地人，她们之间的关系不仅是厂里的工友，还是同村的乡邻，也是会带着孩子一起玩儿的朋友，大家都对彼此的家庭知根知底。相对于流动性较大的打工群体，我们厂更像是一个一起工作的社群，户籍和乡土构建出更加紧密的连结。和工友的交往，在工厂的生活几乎令我感到踏实和幸福，我发觉真正的现实是无法被归类为任何一种叙事的，它所包含的情感和关系会粉碎掉那些刻板印象，以无比具体的方式重新构筑生活本身，甚至在其中我学到了如何忠于生活。这些都与“背离”相距甚远，同时，在项目的过程中我对二次剥削和凝视是充满警惕的，在工厂里工作的镜头我只对准我自己，我们的工作都是一样的，我愿意暴露自己是出于作品需要，但不愿凝视劳动中的工友们。而阶级性问题，我所能做到的唯有切实地工作，诚恳地体认譬安的生活，通过劳动形成的关系进入在地话语系统，并在这一过程中审视自我。并且，我想再强调一下这两点都不是我所要指向的重点，因为从一开始很明确的一点是：这是一个艺术项目，即便中间有由于观念主旨所产生的社会介入环节，但它不是一个社会科学方向的田野调查，最终还是要回到艺术语境去探讨问题。

LEAP 带着雕塑经验做足部按摩，一开始会不适应吗？

郑确 从实际操作层面来说，不会，因为学足疗的时候对象是真正的人脚，人体皮肤会在按压后回弹，因此不涉及视觉上的形塑判断。从理论层面来说，略有不适应，因为在北京成人按摩学校学习的时候，第一节就是理论课，讲到足疗的四大作用原理，分别是“生物全息学说原理”“神经反射学原理”“循环学说原理”和“经络学说原理”。简而言之就是“以小见大”：脚是人体的整体缩影，核心概念则是“反射”，即通过按压这些足部投影区通过经络反射到整个人体，促进循环。这一套理论和我之前对人体的理解不太相同，是我从未涉足过的方向，还是给予了我一些冲击的。

在按摩学校学习的过程很有趣，班上的同学年龄差距极大，最小的刚满 14 岁，最大的有 60 多岁了。大部分同学都是上的脱产班，三个月学完全套按摩针灸，我属于是插班生，是班里的新面孔，但是大家都很有热情。课程内容也和以往的上课不太一样，会在专业内容中间穿插许多实用技巧，比如教大家推销泡脚药的话术、增加自己业绩的窍门等等。并且，这是我第一次在课堂上和老师、同学有如此密切的肢体接触，大家三人一组，轮流当足疗模特，另外两个人一人按一只脚。老师也会以学生为教具直接上手示范，从洗脚开始一步步的、手把手的教学。在雕塑的教学中，模特是不可侵犯的客体，我们之间必须保持相当客观的距离，而老师和同学之间的交流也是秉持着一定界限的精神指导和共鸣。“距离”是构造雕塑教室的核心，每个人都在各自的位置上，做着各自的事情，而足疗教室却直接地消除了这一点，大量的肢体接触消除了身份和距离的隔阂，也加快了我融入集体的速度。

LEAP 感觉在这两部作品中，劳动的长时间和高强度都是很重要的条件，你是否是借此让自己形成无意识的身体记忆，去覆盖之前的身体记忆。某种程度上，你自己的身体才是这里的雕塑材料。

郑确 是的，身体确实是最直接的雕塑或者说”改造”材料，只有长时间和高强度才能造成一种身体的形变，从而显现其自身。例如，我的足疗老师以及工龄较长的同事，手指关节处都因为长期的用力变得更加粗大，手指的力度也相当强劲；还有许多女工，由于久坐和低头工作导致颈椎和腰椎都不是很好，一些年纪大的女工驼背的症状会更严重。我在从事工作以来，也发生了不同的身体形变，学雕塑的时候，因为总是双手向前使劲儿，我的胸肌很发达，背部力量弱，肩膀会有些内扣；足疗的时候手劲儿明显增强，总是沾水，皮肤也更粗糙了；在工厂的时候，还经常和厂长等人一起装货，肩膀变宽了，三角肌变大了，整个人晒得有点黑黑的，看上去很结实。身体在劳动中向外施力，其反作用力令身体显示出了它的轮廓，也有点像石雕，在一整块石头中能看到一个人，并通过雕凿让它浮现出来。

伊朗的天使学里有一个叫做妲厄娜（Daena）的天使，它陪伴我们的一生，随着我们的每一个行动、言语和思想而变化，只有在死亡后我

们才能看到它的模样，那是由我们的一生所重塑的面庞，所勾勒出的轮廓。身体通常是艺术家主体性的载体，通过身体去实践出各种各样的作品，但在项目中我似乎在强调这一点的反面，身体在实践中也遭遇了形变，也面临着被重塑、被改造的客体状况。但是最终，这种身体（及精神）被塑造的客体状况又变成了形塑生命整体轮廓的主体。如何在遭遇中秉持自我意识，并且自觉地锻炼和磨砺？我想就应当从身体开始。毕竟，自己的身体是能够被改造的最小单位。

LEAP 在“厂妹”这部作品里，空间也是非常重要的考量因素，你主动做了身体与空间关系的分析，甚至规划了未来展览的空间和参观动线。你曾经说过，“我总是试图通过‘行为’把‘空间’缝合在我的身上，这样我的情绪和记忆就有了一个安全的‘场所’，如同一条蛞蝓在不断地扮演蜗牛。”



《足疗教程》(静帧)
2024 年，行为录像，3840 × 2160 像素、彩色、有声、45 分钟

Foot Massage Tutorial (Still)
2024, Performance video, 3840 × 2160 pixels, color, sound, 45 minutes

郑确

“空间”始终是我创作中的核心问题，它是基本，也是界限。当我们谈到艺术表达时，一味地输出观点即使再精妙，也只会呈现出一种自恋式的迷人，而我想要的是动人。这种动人所关联的是归位和召唤，其之所以动人是因为我们共享了一种此时此地的共同处境之中。处境由物 / 身体、空间和时间的多种张力关系构成，而张力关系关联物 / 身体的属性，其呈现形式的有效性则建立于物 / 身体在空间中的归位，就像钥匙进入锁孔。此时的艺术表达才能唤出（相应的）状态和气氛。因此，对空间的研究是最基本的对艺术关系的重视，没有容器就没有内容。

在工厂期间，劳动最大程度地调动了我的身体，直接构建了一种流动着的身體和空間之间的关系。一个工厂如何分配空间，生产资料 and 商品如何占有空间更是直接呈现了工厂的生存状况。或者说，商品就是为了占领空间而生的，商品逻辑是一种空间政治学，而我们的身体是被调配的工具。这一点令“厂妹”项目在同一主旨下呈现出了与“足疗”不同的面貌，在展厅中的空间设想首先是为了观众见证身体在场而服务，其次是将空间斗争以最直接的方式与观众的身体相连，形成压缩的空间逻辑模型。

LEAP

可以请你多谈一谈在“厂妹”里，概念与概念之间、人与人之间的张力与平衡吗？

郑确

对于艺术表达而言，基本的重要关系在开始就已经设定清楚了，包括时间关系被严格地设定在外贸季节：鉴于我的“女工”的第一身份以及“艺术家”的中转身份，我所做的工作既是劳动生产也是艺术生产，既是商品也是艺术品。在一个东方青年艺术家无法走入西方主流艺术市场的情况下，我选择让我的作品以小商品的形式走入西方市场。这样的行动是一种黑色幽默。我希望传达在这种黑色幽默下所隐藏的全球化语境下艺术与经济、劳动与消费之间的微妙平衡，由“艺术家”这个中转身份所引出的围绕劳动和身体的几对置换关系（产品 - 艺术品，流水线劳动 - 艺术生产），以及我和表达对象的关系——我的文字都截取自同妈妈的家书，而不是日记或者回忆录。

另外，有两组重要的关系是真正去了工厂后才逐渐建立起来的。

第一组关系上文已经有所涉猎，即劳动中的身体和空间关系。我们厂子规模属于中小型工厂，员工不算多，占地面积 6000 余平，被多种劳动功能分割的工厂空间既庞大又琐碎。“流动”是空间的 最大特征，“劳动”是第一驱动力，“身体”是劳动作用于空间的媒介。例如，在打包这个工种里，一开始我面前的生产资料堆积如山，通过我的劳动，面前的山逐渐的缩小、变窄，我完成的 商品被我抛到背后，商品越来越多，直到把我整个人都围困在里头。我像是在演绎当代的“愚公移山”，把面前这堆山，通过劳动，挪到我的后背去。还有分拣零件的工作，因为需要在各个不同的袋子里分拣零件，我就一直在围绕着这些袋子打转，就像一只旋转的陀螺。总之，空间在持续地被挪移和填充中流动。三周后，我进入缝纫和粘贴工种，身体仿佛变成了空间的消化系统：吞下捆扎好的一摞摞质料，经身体劳动（粘贴、缝纫）消化后，吐出堆叠在地上的成品。到我离开的时候，我已经完全掌握了从摊布、裁剪、缝纫、粘贴、打包、质检到最后装货的全部流程。除了这条主线工作流程以外，厂子里还有许多零零碎碎的辅助工作，它们夹杂在生产环节的缝隙中间，是一些不具名的劳动，比如捆扎裁剪好的布块、把缝纫过的半成品翻面、核对及分发订单物料等。如果没有在工厂实际劳作，可能无法想象出如此具体、繁琐的碎片工作，每一个工作都会产生一种相对应的身体劳动形态，每一种形态都会生产出一种流动的空间状态。

第二组关系是人际关系，工厂的劳动并不是一个孤立的行为，它嵌套在一个高度依赖协作和社群的环境中。我们厂是一个扎根本地的小型工厂，工友们几乎都来自附近村落。她们之间不仅是同事，也是乡邻和朋友，甚至可以说是一种家庭式的工作社群。比如，工友会在忙碌中带来自家种的玉米、瓜果或者自制的零食一起分享，也会在开海的季节在办公室一起做梭子蟹大餐，甚至在我走之前我们还计划了整个办公室携家带口一起去山顶露营。这种关系充满了日常性和亲密感，远远超越了流水线表面的机械性。

海芳姐教我粘帽球、缝纫机的使用，带我参加“赶交流”（赶集），还和小娇姐、蓉蓉姐以及她们的小孩一起去不插电游乐园，莎莎姐开车带我去县城吃淮南牛肉汤，厂长也经常和我谈他自驾游的理想，经营厂子的理念。甚至在我



工厂打样纸板
《磨合》（静帧）
2023–2024 年，3840 × 2160 像素、彩色、有声

Prototype cardboards in the factory
Breaking In (Still)
2023–2024, 3840 × 2160 pixels, color, sound



《劳动记录 / 1：摊布和裁片》（静帧）
行为录像，3840 × 2160 像素、彩色、有声
劳动时长：2 小时，劳动日期：2023 年 7 月 15 日

Labor Record 1: Spreading and Cutting the Cloth (Still)
Performance Video, 3840 × 2160 pixels, color, sound
Labor Duration: 2 hours, Labor Date: July 15, 2023



不插电游乐园
《磨合》(静帧)
2023-2024 年, 3840 × 2160 像素、彩色、有声

Amusement Park without electricity
Breaking In (Still)
2023-2024, 3840 × 2160 pixels, color, sound



车间吃瓜
《磨合》(静帧)
2023-2024 年, 3840 × 2160 像素、彩色、有声

Eating a watermelon together in the factory
Breaking In (Still)
2023-2024, 3840 × 2160 pixels, color, sound

租住的地方，我和邻居大哥也交换瓜果，还参加所在村子的露天电影放映，村民们给我递来西瓜和瓜子，支书给我介绍村子的历史。我到磐安的时候，山顶正在建摩天轮，就在两个月里，从一个残缺的形状修建成了一个完整的圆，我仿佛也和这个摩天轮一样逐渐在本地扎根和生长。

离开工厂后，12 月底，莎莎姐给我发信息说厂里新做了圣诞产品，要给我寄过来一些，是新做的圣诞苹果盒！拆开快递，里面除了圣诞苹果盒还有两条利群软阳光。这个烟很特殊，堪称浙江本地硬通货，在浙江“中华”也不好使，必须得是这个烟。厂长本身不抽烟不喝酒，他说我喜欢抽烟，特意开车出去给我买的。

用语言去表达这种强烈的情感连结总是那么的苍白，而具体的现实和感受又是如此鲜活。“工厂”原本于我只是一种遥远的景观切片，是文艺叙事里被不断重述的客体。当我真正地进入工厂，它不再是某一种标签、样本或者概念，而是深深地和它所在的地域，以及这片土地上的人建立了稳固的关系。

但在这其中，我也仍旧会反问自己一些关系局限性的问题：我是否能够真正成为她们的一部分？我的劳动是否可以完全摆脱对艺术创作的目的性？这些问题一直贯穿于整个项目的过程中。

LEAP

这两部作品，对你来说如何改造了艺术？我是否可以问，按摩和重复劳动如何改造了艺术，小工厂如何改造美术馆？

郑确

这个问题很尖锐，也直指我的野心。我所提出的用劳动生产经验去覆盖艺术生产经验，首先改造自我，然后改造我的艺术生产方式，放在更加广泛的语境里来看，实际上我想尝试改造的是艺术能否去精英化、去门槛化，我们能否做出更加贴切生活的、朴实的、真诚的艺术。针对这一点的努力，包括我对身体、空间、气氛、处境和物性的研究，想要达到一种无需“理解”，直达“领会”的动人。

从这个角度来看，在“足疗”的项目中，我尝试重新定义“技法”与“身体感知”之间的关系。在雕塑创作中，我曾经习惯以艺术教育训练出的“技法”为核心，用手中的工具去控制材料、塑造形状。但按摩要求的不是“控制”，

而是“感知”。它让我用手去“听”对方的身体，体会压力、反馈和韵律，这种感知的敏锐度直接影响了我对雕塑的理解：创作不只是艺术家单向的输出，而是与材料或对象的平等对话。流水线劳动进一步强化了这一点。当我反复粘贴、缝纫、打包时，我的身体开始记忆这些动作，动作的机械化让“创作”不再是纯粹的个人表达，而是一种与更大的生产体系同步的行为。这种转变让我意识到，艺术可以从追求独创性转向一种身体经验的积累与共享。

另外，我也在探索从“作品”转向“过程”。按摩和重复劳动的核心在于“过程”本身，而不是结果。这种经验让我反思，艺术是否也可以不再以“完成的作品”为终点，而转向一种更动态、开放的状态。比如，在“厂妹”中，劳动的结果——圣诞帽或复活节装饰品——并不那么重要，重要的是劳动如何改变了我的身体，如何将这些日常物品转化为艺术的讨论对象。我也想要尝试探索空间作为载体，对它的发掘和讨论能否作为一种总体知觉替代孤立性作品。

至于小工厂如何改造美术馆，由于项目未曾落地，我目前还停留在臆想的阶段，但我认为无论是足疗还是工厂，都引入了一个完全不同的逻辑——效率、重复、功能性，以及人与空间的动态关系。美术馆传统上是一个高度神圣化、独立化的空间，观者往往被动地接受艺术家的表达。而工厂是一个完全不同的环境，它混乱、琐碎，充满了生活的痕迹。在“厂妹”中，我试图将工厂的生产逻辑带入展览空间：通过重现生产流程、复制劳动场景，让观众体验一种非观念化的、直接的空间流动。同时，观众和我在平等的地位中争夺空间，当他们踢开挡在前进路上的作品时，他们的参与不再是一种过家家式的配合，这样不仅我的身体显现了，观众的身体也亮相了。并且，工厂生产强调效率和可复制性，而艺术传统上追求独特和不可替代。“厂妹”通过商品化的艺术品颠覆了这一价值逻辑。比如，一个圣诞帽既是流水线上的廉价商品，也是经过艺术家劳动再定义的艺术品。这种混淆让人重新思考艺术的“价值”到底来源于什么——是它的独创性，还是它被赋予的社会语境？

郑确，一个神秘的都市丽人。以行为、装置、影像、文字为主要创作方式，她作品的关键词是空间、本土和幽默。“空间”是问题，“本土”是视角，“幽默”是态度。

In 2022, Zheng Que began her “Laogai Trilogy,” viewing “labor” as the means of transforming art production and the “artist” as an intermediary identity. She sought to encompass her artistic practice with labor experience. She has completed the first two parts, “Foot Massage” and “Factory Girl.” In “Foot Massage,” she learned foot massage techniques and used the methods and approximate duration of foot therapy to shape clay sculptures. As she gained more experience, her sculptures gradually evolved. In “Factory Girl,” which began in 2023, she worked at a holiday gift and decoration factory in Pan’an County, Jinhua City, during the foreign trade season (July–September). She rotated through all positions on the production line: cutting, sewing, nailing, quality control, and packaging. The factory mainly exports products such as Easter hats, Halloween costumes, Christmas hats, and stockings. Over the three months, her artworks were transformed into small commodities and entered Western markets.

Zheng Que’s “Laogai Trilogy” has not yet been publicly displayed, but she has already envisioned her future exhibition. The project did not just result from her interest in labor, but from her own experience as an artist: becoming educated in the arts, studying at an art academy, and already working in the field. She seeks labor and a social context beyond art to confront the confusion and challenges that art presents to her. Although she uses the term “Laogai,” meaning “reform through labor”, which carries significant historical connotations in mainland China, she doesn’t extend the project to the “re-education” or “forced labor” experienced by intellectuals in the late twentieth century. Instead, she returns to a fundamental question: What does labor bring to a person, and what does it bring to art?

LEAP	I was initially drawn to the term “laogai.” Originally, “reform through Labor” referred to intellectuals being re-educated, but in your case, it’s art that is being reformed. Why do you think art needs to be reformed?
Zheng Que	The term “laogai” was originally set up for counter-revolutionaries and intellectuals in the early years of the People’s Republic of China. After the Reform and Opening-up, it became a system of punishment for criminals. Although the former referred to specific classes,

the core implicit meaning of the term is “atonement.” It places criminals in a specific set of production relationships, with the aim of reforming them through labor to become “new people.” I appropriated this term as the title of my trilogy because, first, it succinctly encapsulates the core idea of my project, and second, its critical implications in the Chinese context are self-evident. Besides, the phrase “reform through labor”, with “reform” as the core word, points to both my personal predicament and the broader crisis I see within contemporary art today.

I believe art needs to be reformed because, to some extent, contemporary art has fallen into a self-contained niche. It speaks only to itself within the white-cube space and is far removed from broader social realities and the life experiences of ordinary people. This somewhat narcissistic arrogance has led it to be presented in a vacuum, caught in a situation that feels almost like hitting a dead end repeatedly. I, too, face a similar predicament. The vacuum of urban life, or what sociologist Xiang Biao refers to as “suspension,” often makes me doubt whether my thoughts and expressions have objective value. I feel as if I am merely observing life rather than truly living it. I want to change, to do some practical work, to live genuinely. I don’t want to be a drifting leaf carried by the current, nor do I want art to merely be an outdated ornament.

However, “reforming art” is a grand vision. Despite the ambition implied in my project, I do not have the capacity to reform such a vast and complex system. That’s why I started from myself: labor first reformed and reshaped me, and naturally, it reformed my approaches to artistic production. The physical labor, with its painful transformation, prevents individual expression from becoming a mere grumble. Using “myself” as an example also illustrates the power of “reformation” more concretely, providing art with the potential to alert.

“Reformation” is neither about giving up nor compromise, but is a form of optimistic salvation. I like this kind of seemingly naïve optimism, which contains much hope and anticipation. At the same time, it also carries a metaphor of “atonement,” in line with the original meaning of the term, where physical labor redeems the authenticity of both art and life.

LEAP	How did the idea of using labor to reform art first come to you?
ZQ	I started noticing that people who do a lot of mental work often face a common problem—too much energy leads to overthinking. My mind is always racing with random thoughts. It’s like a tangled mess that grows and takes over, and the only time I can get it to stop is when my body starts moving. Also, I think I might be a bit like a dog—I need to get enough exercise every day to burn extra energy. Otherwise, I end up staying up all night, feeling restless. So, when I wanted to change my routine and focus my mind and body on something concrete, physical labor became the obvious answer. Labor makes work and production feel real—it pushes back against the emptiness of chasing meaning and allows the body to emerge clearly and concretely from murkiness.

Another reason I chose “labor” is because even though both mental and physical labor are forms of work, mental labor tends to earn more respect socially. And art is often seen as a high-level, intellectual pursuit. But I don’t think artists should be seen as privileged, isolated figures, separate from society. Joseph Beuys said, “everyone is an artist.” But today, is the title of “artist” really that important? I think artistic production should be on the same level as any other kind of work. Artists can be workers or farmers, and they can find creativity and meaning in labor. In fact, right now, when manual laborers are often looked down upon as “lower-class,” we should be rethinking labor. “Labor is the most honorable” shouldn’t just be

a slogan (which was popular during the socialist era)—it should be a fact.

Also, when I was younger, I often heard stories from my family about prisoners being forced to dig earth—digging up one cubic meter of earth, filling it in, then digging it up again. It kind of felt like a Sisyphean punishment or even a spiritual practice. This stuck with me for years, like this nagging feeling that would pop up every now and then. Physical labor always seemed connected to repetition, and repetition felt like something boring, tedious, and meaningless. But the body is really honest. Different kinds of labor leave different kinds of muscles and memories on the body. Repetition completes the body in a way that I find really fascinating.

LEAP	Does this project relate to your experience studying sculpture? Because in my stereotypical view, sculpture is indeed a medium that requires the body to handle large-scale materials.
ZQ	Yes, it’s definitely connected. The idea for the project actually started with a joke. There was a time when my finances weren’t great, and I wasn’t getting much work. I jokingly said to my roommate, “Making art sounds respectable, but making sculptures and doing foot massages are pretty much the same, except the masseuse probably makes more money than I do.” From that joke, I gradually developed the structure of the whole project, with physical labor as the core and the transitional role of art as the key concept—I find the word “art” very flexible, like a revolving door, where anything can come in and go out. In fact, the first two parts of the trilogy, “Foot Massage” and “Factory Girl,” are both related to sculpture. Both foot massage and sculpture involve the scale of the hands, and the factory I chose is a fabric gift processing factory, which uses techniques like surface adhesion and processing: methods with which I was already familiar from my time in university.

Even though my work now often presents itself through performance, video, text, and installations, my thinking is still based on sculpture. I emphasize the role of force and reaction. The three key words I focus on—space, locality, and humor—also come from sculpture. “Space” comes first because it’s always been the core issue in my work. Sculpture always presents itself as a finished product, but for the creator, the process is an incredibly concrete and physical labor, which has led to a deep affection for the presence of the body and a kind of obsession with process.

LEAP Was it challenging to adapt your sculpting skills to foot massage?

ZQ On a practical level, not really. When learning foot massage, you’re working with real human feet—skin rebounds under pressure, so there’s no need for the kind of visual judgment involved in shaping materials. The theoretical side, though, took me some time to get used to. At the Beijing Adult Massage School, the first lesson was purely theoretical, introducing four foundational principles of foot massage: the “holographic theory,” the “neuro-reflexology principle,” the “circulatory theory,” and the “meridian theory.” To put it simply, it’s all about “seeing the big picture in the small”: the foot is seen as a microcosm of the body, with the concept of “reflection” at its core—pressing on specific foot zones is believed to stimulate meridians and improve bodily circulation. This perspective was a bit jarring for me, as it contrasted significantly with my previous understanding of the human body.

Learning at the massage school was quite interesting. The age range in my class was vast, with the youngest student just 14 and the oldest over 60. Most of them were full-time students attending a three-month course covering massage and acupuncture. I joined as a transfer student and was the newcomer in class, but everyone was very welcoming. The lessons were quite different from my past

educational experiences. Along with the professional stuff, they threw in a lot of practical tips, like how to pitch foot soaking products and little tricks to boost your sales. It was also my first time engaging in such intimate physical contact with teachers and classmates in a classroom. We formed groups of three, taking turns as foot massage models while the other two practiced—each working on one foot. The teacher would also use students as demonstration models, guiding us step-by-step, from washing feet to massage techniques. In sculpture training, the model is an untouchable object, and there’s a deliberate, professional distance upheld between students, teachers, and models. The sculpting studio operates with “distance” as a key principle—everyone stays in their space, focusing on their own work. But the foot massage classroom completely broke down that separation. The significant physical contact quickly erased any sense of hierarchy or boundaries, which, in turn, helped me integrate into the group much faster.

LEAP It seems that in these two series of works, the long hours and high intensity of labor are crucial. Are you using this to create unconscious bodily memories that override your previous ones? In a way, your own body is the sculptural material here.

ZQ Yes, the body is indeed the most direct material for sculpting or, you could say, “reform”. Only with long hours and intense labor can you cause physical deformation, making the body reveal itself. For example, my foot massage teacher and colleagues with many years of experience have larger finger joints from the constant pressure, and their hands are very strong. Many female workers also suffer from poor neck and lower back health due to prolonged sitting and looking down during their work. Older workers often show more serious signs of hunching. Since I’ve started working, my body has also undergone changes. When I was learning sculpture, because I was always pushing



《足疗 #1-23》
2022 年，雕塑，大理石，30 × 23 × 17 厘米

Foot Massage #1-23
2022, Sculpture, Marble, 30 × 23 × 17 cm



《足疗 #1-35》
2023 年，雕塑，大理石，35 × 28 × 18 厘米

Foot Massage #1-35
2022, Sculpture, Marble, 35 × 28 × 18 cm

forward with both hands, my chest muscles became very developed, while my back strength remained weak, causing my shoulders to round slightly. In foot massage, my hand strength noticeably increased, and since I was always handling water, my skin also became rougher. At the factory, I often helped the factory manager with loading goods, which broadened my shoulders and increased the size of my deltoid muscles. My skin got tanned, and I looked more solid. The body exerts force outward during labor, and the resulting counterforce reveals the body’s contours, much like stone-carving: in a solid block of stone, you can see the figure of a person, and through carving, it is made to emerge.

In Iranian angelology, there’s an angel named Daena that accompanies us throughout our lives, changing with our every action, thought, and word. Only after death can we see its true form, which is the face reshaped by our entire life, the contours drawn by our actions. The body is typically the carrier of an artist’s subjectivity, through which they express various works. But in this project, I seem to be emphasizing the opposite: the body encounters deformation in the process and faces the situation of being reshaped—being transformed into an object. However, in the end, this body (and mind) being shaped and objectified becomes the subject that shapes the overall contours of life. How can one maintain self-awareness in the face of these experiences and consciously practice and refine oneself? I believe it should start with the body. After all, the body is the smallest unit that can be transformed.

LEAP In “Factory Girl,” space is also a crucial consideration. You intentionally analyzed the relationship between the body and space, and already imagined about the spatial design and visitor flow for future shows. You once said, “I always try to ‘sew’ space onto my body through ‘action’, so that my emotions and memories have a

safe ‘site’, like a slug constantly pretending to be a snail.”

ZQ

Space has always been a core issue in my work. It’s both fundamental and a boundary. When we talk about artistic expression, simply outputting ideas, no matter how brilliant, will only present a kind of narcissistic charm. What I want is something touching. What makes it touching is a sense of placement and call—because we share a common situation, in this moment and place. That situation is made up of various tensions between objects / bodies, space, and time. The tension between them is tied to the properties of objects / bodies, and the effectiveness of the presented form depends on their placement in space. It’s like a key entering a lock: only when it fits can the artistic expression evoke the corresponding feeling or atmosphere. So, studying space is essentially a study of the human being’s relationship to art. Without a container, there’s no content.

ZQ

During my time at the factory, labor maximized the engagement of my body, directly affecting the flow of relationships between the body and space. How a factory allocates its space—how production materials and products occupy space—directly reflects the factory’s economic conditions. In a way, products exist to occupy space; the logic of a product is a form of spatial politics, and our bodies are the tools to be allocated. This difference is what gives “*Factory Girl*” a different appearance from “*Foot Massage*,” despite both projects sharing the same underlying theme. The spatial concept in the exhibition is designed first to allow the audience to witness the presence of the body, and secondly, to connect the spatial struggle directly with the viewer’s body, creating a compressed spatial logic model.

LEAP

In “*Factory Girl*,” the tension and balance between concepts and between people seem very important. Could you talk more about this?

ZQ

For artistic expression, the essential relationships were established at the very beginning, including art’s relationship to time, which was strictly set within the foreign trade season. Given my primary identity as a “female worker” and my secondary role as an “artist,” the work I did was both labor production and art production; the product, both a commodity and an artwork. In a situation where a young Chinese artist can’t break into the Western mainstream art market, I chose to let my work enter the Western market in the form of small commodities. This action is a kind of dark humor. Through this dark humor, I want to convey the subtle balance between art and economics, labor and consumption, within the context of globalization. This balance is explored through several pairs of interchangeable concepts surrounding labor and the body—such as the product vs. the artwork, assembly line labor vs. art production—and also through the relationship between myself and those to whom I am writing. My writings are excerpted from letters written to my mother, not from a diary or memoir.

There are two important relationships that were only gradually established after I actually went into the factory.

The first relationship, which I briefly touched upon earlier, is the relationship between the body and space in labor. Our factory is a medium-sized one, not too big, with about 6,000 square meters of space. This space, divided by various labor functions, is vast but also fragmented. “Movement” is the defining feature of space, “labor” is the primary driving force, and “the body” serves as the medium through which labor acts on space. For example, when working in packing, at first, the pile of materials in front of me was enormous. Through my labor, the pile gradually shrank and narrowed. The products I completed were thrown behind me, and the pile grew larger until it surrounded me completely. It felt like I was



《劳动记录 / 15：缝纫》(静帧)
行为录像，3840 × 2160 像素、彩色、有声
劳动时长：3 小时，劳动日期：2023 年 8 月 13 日

Labor Record/15: Sewing (Still)
Performance Video, 3840 × 2160 pixels, color, sound
Labor Duration: 3 hours, Labor Date: August 13, 2023



《劳动记录 / 1：摊布和裁片》(静帧)
行为录像，3840 × 2160 像素、彩色、有声
劳动时长：2 小时，劳动日期：2023 年 7 月 15 日

Labor Record/1: Spreading and Cutting the Cloth (Still)
Performance Video, 3840 × 2160 pixels, color, sound
Labor Duration: 2 hours, Labor Date: July 15, 2023



《劳动记录 / 18：粘帽球》（静帧）
行为录像，3840 × 2160 像素、彩色、有声
劳动时长：2.5 小时，劳动日期：2023 年 8 月 16 日

Labor Record/18: Sticking Hat Balls (Still)
Performance video, 3840 × 2160 pixels, color, sound
Labor Duration: 2.5 hours, Labor Date: August 16, 2023



《劳动记录 / 9：包树裙比赛》（静帧）
行为录像，3840 × 2160 像素、彩色、有声
劳动时长：1.5 小时，劳动日期：2023 年 7 月 31 日

Labor Record/9: Tree Skirt Wrapping Competition (Still)
Performance Video, 3840 × 2160 pixels, color, sound
Labor Duration: 1.5 hours, Labor Date: July 31, 2023

performing a contemporary version of the “foolish old man moving mountains” (a fable in China), moving the pile from in front of me to behind me through labor. In the components-sorting job, because I had to sort components in different bags, I was constantly spinning around those bags, like a spinning top. In essence, the space was continuously shifted and filled as I worked. After three weeks, I moved on to sewing and gluing, and my body almost became a digestive system for the space: swallowing bundles of materials, processing them through labor (gluing, sewing), and then spitting them out as finished products on the ground. By the time I left, I had completely mastered the whole production process, from laying out the fabric to cutting, sewing, gluing, packing, quality checking, and, finally, loading the products. Besides this main workflow, the factory also had many small, auxiliary tasks hidden in the gaps between the production steps. These were nameless labor activities, like tying up cut fabric pieces, flipping over sewn, semi-finished products, and checking and distributing orders. Without actual work in the factory, it would be hard to imagine how specific and detailed these tasks were. Each labor task produced its own corresponding bodily form, and each form created a flowing spatial state.

The second key relationship is the one between people. Labor in the factory isn’t an isolated task; it’s deeply embedded in a collaborative, community-driven environment. Our factory is a small, locally based operation, and most of the workers come from nearby villages. They’re not just colleagues, but also neighbors and friends—almost like a big work family. For example, during breaks, workers would often bring corn, fruit, or homemade snacks to share. When crab season arrived, we’d throw a big crab feast together in the office. Before I left, we even planned a family camping trip to the mountaintop. These relationships were grounded in everyday intimacy, far

surpassing the impersonal, mechanical nature of assembly line work.

Sister Haifang taught me how to glue the cap balls and use the sewing machine, and even took me to local markets. I also went with Sister Xiaojiao, Sister Rongrong, and their kids to an amusement park. Sister Shasha drove me to the country for a bowl of Huainan beef soup. The factory manager often shared his dreams of road trips and his philosophy on running the factory. Even at my rented place, I swapped fruit with my neighbor and went to open-air movie screenings in the village. The villagers would pass me watermelon and sunflower seeds, and the village head would tell me about the local history. When I arrived in Pan’an, a ferris wheel was under construction on the mountain. Over the two months I was there, it went from a broken frame to a complete circle. I felt like I, too, was slowly rooting myself and growing in the area, just like that ferris wheel.

After leaving the factory in December, Sister Shasha texted me to say they had made new Christmas products and would send me some. When the package arrived, it contained Christmas apple boxes and two packs of “Liqun Soft Sunshine” cigarettes. This particular brand is a local staple in Zhejiang—you can’t even get “Chunghwa” (a more famous Chinese brand) here, it’s got to be Liqun. The factory manager himself doesn’t smoke or drink, but knowing I liked smoking, he made the effort to drive out and get them for me.

It’s always hard to express strong emotional connections in words, but the real experiences and feelings are so vivid. The “factory” used to be just a distant, fragmented image for me—an object that kept coming up in art narratives. But when I actually stepped into the factory, it wasn’t a label, a sample, or just a concept anymore. It became deeply intertwined with the land it was on and the people who lived there.

Still, I continue to question some of the limits of these relationships: Can I truly become one of them? Can my labor be completely detached from its artistic purpose? These questions have been with me throughout the entire project.

LEAP

How have these two works transformed art for you? How have massage and repetitive labor affected your art, and how a small factory has transformed the art gallery?

ZQ

That’s a really pointed question, and it gets right to the heart of my ambition. What I’ve been trying to do by blending labor production with art production is first to transform myself and then to transform my approach to making art. On a broader scale, I’m asking whether art can move away from elitism and exclusivity. Can we make art that’s more connected to everyday life—simpler, more honest, and more real? This effort is reflected in my research into the body, space, atmosphere, context, and materiality, all with the goal of creating something that doesn’t require “understanding” but can instead be directly felt.

In this sense, in the “Foot Massage” project, I tried to redefine the relationship between “technique” and “bodily perception.” In my sculptural work, I was once trained to focus on the “technique”—controlling materials and shaping forms with the tools in my hands. But massage doesn’t ask for “control”; it asks for “awareness.” It taught me to “listen” to the body, to feel its pressure, feedback, and rhythm. This sensitivity completely changed how I approach sculpture: creation is no longer a one-way output from the artist, but an equal dialogue with the material or subject. Factory labor strengthened this understanding. When I was repeating tasks like gluing, sewing, and packaging, my body started to memorize these movements. The mechanical nature of the work made “creation” less about personal expression and more



人力过山车
《磨合》(静帧)
2023–2024 年, 3840 × 2160 像素、彩色、有声

Human-powered roller coaster
Breaking In (Still)
2023–2024, 3840 × 2160 pixels, color, sound



村头露天电影
《磨合》(静帧)
2023–2024 年, 3840 × 2160 像素、彩色、有声

Open-air screening in the village
Breaking In (Still)
2023–2024, 3840 × 2160 pixels, color, sound

about syncing up with a larger system of production. This shift helped me realize that art can evolve from chasing originality to focusing on the accumulation of shared experience of the body.

I’ve also been exploring a shift from “works” to “process.” The heart of both massage and repetitive labor is the process itself, not the final result. This experience made me question if art could move away from being defined by finished works and become something more dynamic and open. For example, in “Factory Girl,” the final product—the Christmas hats or Easter decorations—wasn’t as important as how the labor transformed my body and how these everyday objects became subjects in the field of art. I also want to see if space, as a medium, can be explored as a whole perceptual experience that replaces isolated works.

As for how a small factory can transform the art gallery, since the project hasn’t been fully realized yet, I’m still imagining it. But I believe both foot massage and factory labor bring in a completely different logic: efficiency, repetition, functionality, and the dynamic relationship between people and space. Traditionally, an art gallery is a sacred, independent space where the audience passively receives the artist’s message. A factory is the opposite—chaotic, fragmented, and full of everyday life. In “Factory Girl,” I tried to bring the factory’s production logic into the gallery space: by re-enacting the production process and replicating labor scenes, I wanted the audience to experience a direct, non-conceptual flow of space. At the same time, the audience and I are equally competing for space. When they push aside pieces blocking their path, their participation becomes active—not just passive engagement. This way, not only does my body emerge, but the audience’s body does too. And while factory production is all about efficiency and replicability, art traditionally values uniqueness and irreplaceability. “Factory

Girl” flips that logic by turning art into a commodity. For example, a Christmas hat is both a cheap product on the assembly line and an artwork redefined by the artist’s labor. This blurring of boundaries makes us question what gives art its “value”—is it its originality, or the social context in which it’s placed?

Translated by Nie Xiaoyi

Zheng Que is a mysterious urban beauty, known for her work in performance, installation, video, and text. Her creative practice revolves around three key concepts: space, locality, and humor. “Space” represents the problem, “locality” offers the perspective, and “humor” serves as the attitude.

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