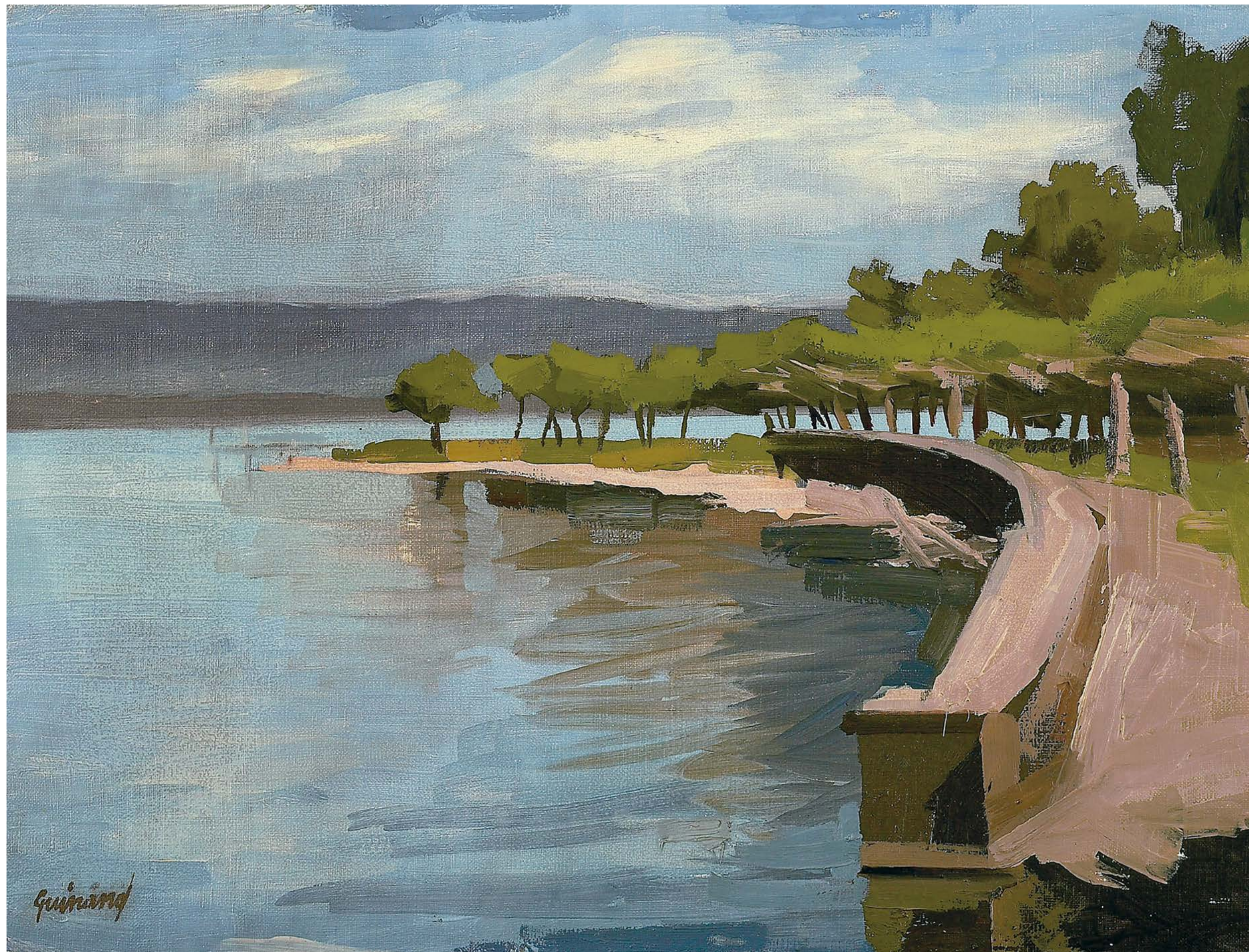
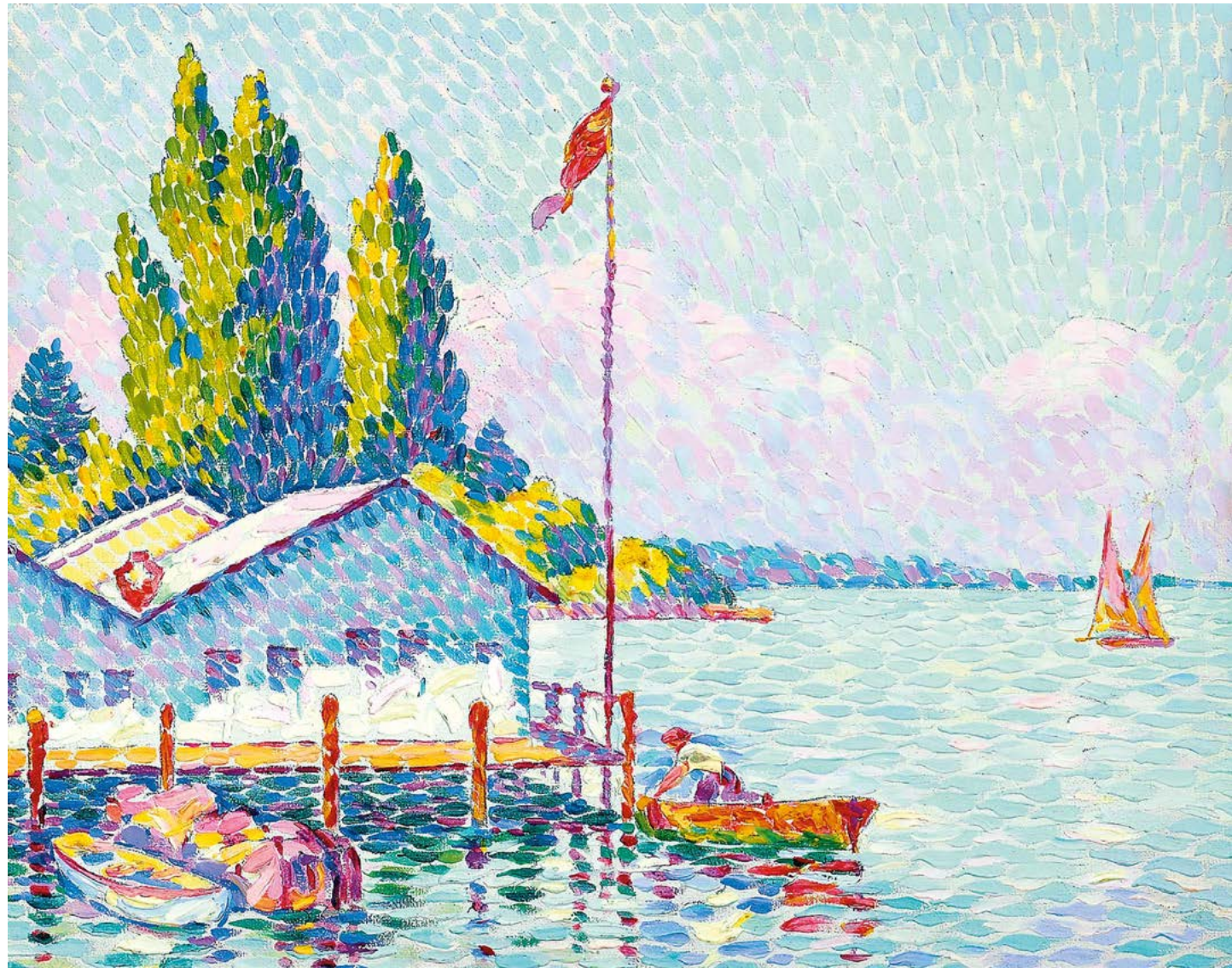


MY ODE TO THE LAKE



Having been raised on the shores of Lake Geneva, Philippe Stern was drawn to the area as his theme when he began to collect art. Here, he fondly recalls his own sailing adventures and the paintings that inspire him, while the historian and novelist Jacques Bressler surveys the collection that Mr. Stern has assembled





A UNIQUE ART COLLECTION INSPIRED BY A LIFELONG LOVE OF LAKE GENEVA

I was a lake child, and from my earliest years I was lulled to sleep by the sound of the waves washing onto the shore at Creux-de-Genthod. In the late 1940s and the early 1950s, there was no chance of going off to see the world as young people do today. My escape was the lake.

Even when very young, I and a few of my friends would set off for several days on our Snipe dinghies to discover the lake and its shores. We imagined ourselves to be great explorers on an expedition. Our goal was the mouth of the Rhône, which marked the beginning of the lake. We rarely made it that far since the wind was not always with us, and we would stop on some wild part of the shore and grill something over a fire, and perhaps even stay the night. When

a storm threatened, we soon learned to head quickly for one of the many small ports along the lakeside.

At those times the ports were deserted. Occasionally we would run into an old fisherman who would tell us hair-raising tales about terrible winds that swept away boats where crews lacked experience and forethought. Ever since, I have remained convinced that the lake is a living element that can neither be tamed nor subdued and that, to feel at ease, one must watch it continuously and be prepared for its sudden changes of mood.

Later on, for almost 40 years my passion for the lake led me to take part in all the regattas organized in the Léman region. Hundreds of regattas, day and night, many of which ended in victory, for example, my seven Bol d'Or triumphs. However, the

pleasure lies not in having beaten my opponents but rather in having mastered all the elements that make up the lake's personality, as well as observing its waves and shores and the mountains around it and, especially, the clouds racing overhead.

Those intense hours, and even days, of navigation were pure joy. They brought me a sense of humility and respect for nature and also an equilibrium that has helped me in my professional life, during which I sailed through a few storms.

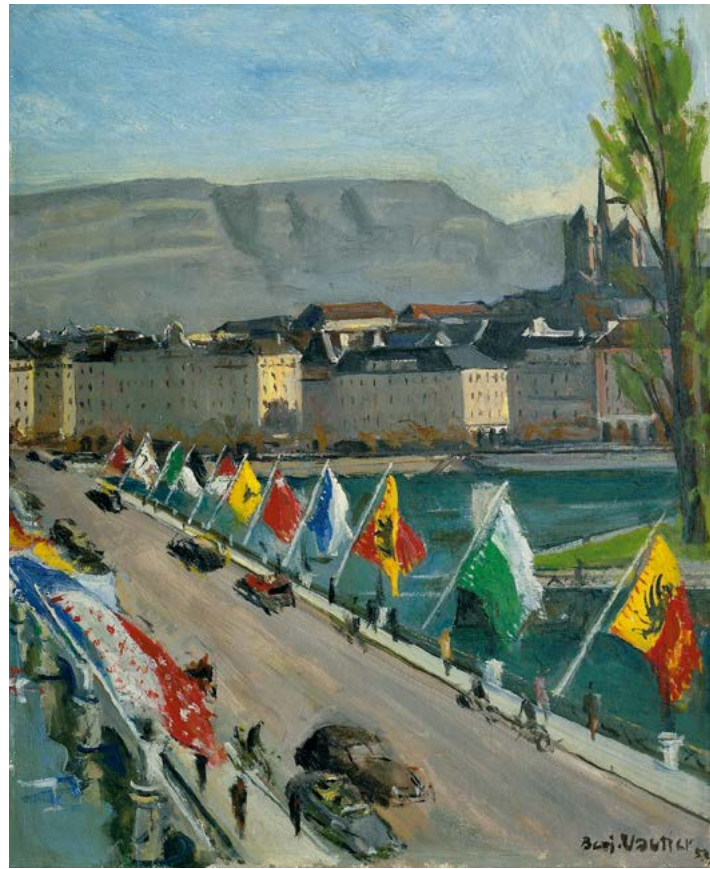
That is why, over the years, I have been collecting paintings that express the personality of the lake and its shores and ports. Some were chosen purely on artistic merit, but I have been especially drawn to works that brought back emotions and memories that I have stored up from my numerous expeditions on the lake. Today, young people



Pages 54–55: the serenity of the lake, as seen in René Guinand's *Le lac à Hermance* (The lake at Hermance) from 1948, provided a soothing contrast to the bustle of twentieth-century city life, which was his usual subject. Page 56: the color and light effects of his native Nice, along with the pointillism of Signac, were strong influences on Edouard de Fer's work. He was active during the early twentieth century, during which he painted *L'embarcadère* (The pier).

This page: scenes of the lake in the late nineteenth century are captured in Constance Suzanne Assinare's paintings, such as the 1898 *Vers le Haut-Lac* (Toward the head of the lake), a study in soft blues of water, mountains, and sky (left), and in the works of Frédéric Dufaix, whose long career spanned the late nineteenth century to the 1940s. The painting below, *Le retour du marché* (Returning from market), is a large-scale work that presents an everyday scene with poetic sensibility





Clockwise, from above: Léon Gaud was a master of landscapes and rustic scenes of the late nineteenth century. In his work *Les dames paysannes d'Hermance* (Peasant women of Hermance) the handling of light and shade that captures the turning of sunset to dusk is exquisite. In contrast, painting in the early 1950s, Benjamin

Vautier the younger revels in the brilliance of the colors of the flags seen in the daytime sunshine in *Le pont du Mont-Blanc pavoisé* (Flags decorating the Mont-Blanc bridge). Vautier had great success as a painter of still lifes but also created stunning landscapes bathed in light, such as this view of Geneva.

Yet perhaps more than any other artist in the collection, Louis Baudit captured the spirit of the landscape. He painted the lake in its many moods and had a gift for capturing the effects of wind on water, cloud formations, and boats catching the breeze, as exemplified by *Le matin devant Cologny* (Morning, Cologny) of 1943





Above: in the mid-twentieth-century work *Le Château de Clérailles près de Rivaz* (The Château de Clérailles, near Rivaz), Albert Duplain's

clever use of perspective gives us an unusual view of Lake Geneva, leading the eye down toward the castle and then out onto the lake

and mountains beyond. Opposite: the atmosphere of sunny, breezy days spent relaxing beside the lake is enjoyed in Ellis Zbinden's

later twentieth-century watercolors, such as *Les parasols sur le quai des Eaux-Vives* (Parasols on the embankment at Eaux-Vives)



might see nothing more in this than nostalgia for bygone pleasures, but I hope that, despite that, they will recognize that the lake is a priceless gift that must be cherished and preserved.

These paintings bear witness to the past that we no longer see: this lakeside spot, that quay, those boats...

THE EXPERT VIEW: JACQUES BRESSLER ON ART THAT CAPTURES A LOST ERA

Few private collections possess the charm and authenticity of the one that has been put together by Mr. and Mrs. Stern around the theme of Lake Geneva.

Travelers and tourists have long visited from all over Europe to admire the beauties of the lake and to sail on its waters. But those fortunate enough to live around it have the great privilege of contemplating daily the impressive expanse of water, the subtle changes in the light that occur according to the hour or season, and the scenes that unfold on its shores.

Such are the images preserved for us by the painters so lovingly selected for the

Stern collection. They also bear witness to the past that we no longer see: this lakeside spot, that quay, those boats... They all once existed, but progress has banished them forever.

One symbol of this lost past is the *barque du Léman*, or Lake Geneva barge, which was a favorite subject of local painters. These barges appear again and again in the Stern collection, and almost all the artists succumbed to their charms. Of particular note in the collection is the superb execution of the works by Auguste Veillon and Albert Gos; the unerring talent of Nathanaël Lemaître; the small paintings by François Bocion; the large-format work of Frédéric

Dufaux; and the austerity, but also the acute observation, of Eugène Martin.

Above all, however, the collection pays tribute to Louis Baudit (see pages 58–59), whom the Stern family supported in 1924 at the time of his first exhibition. This remarkable artist has left us a vision of the Geneva shores and the famous barges that is so true and so poetic that one can never tire of contemplating the major works assembled here.

After viewing the Stern collection, one no longer sees the lake as before. When art remains authentic, refusing to bow to the dictates of fashion, it opens our eyes to nature and mankind. ♣

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