



# MALAYAN LANDSCAPE

A COLLECTION OF MASTERPIECES BY YONG MUN SEN

MUN SEN



### KL Lifestyle Art Space (KLAS)

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# MALAYAN LANDSCAPE

A COLLECTION OF MASTERPIECES BY YONG MUN SEN

11TH - 30TH SEPTEMBER 2024

Presented by

**KL**lifestyle

Organised by

# KLAS

In Collaboration with







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# Yong Mun Sen

FATHER OF MALAYSIAN PAINTING



Yong Mun Sen's Gallery was located at 436, Chulia Street on Penang Island in the 60's till early 70's

In 1914, Yong went back to China and painted majestic pictures of lions and tigers which were subjects much loved by the warlords of the time. Two years later, he married 16-year-old Lam Sek Foong who bore five children. The artist returned to Sarawak in 1917. A year later, he was employed by a bookshop in Singapore and served at a school bookshop counter. Living in Singapore sparked a fondness and appreciation for its urban scene which he later illustrated in numerous watercolours.

Back then, being an artist didn't rake in enough money, hence, to supplement his income, Yong worked at a bookshop and subsequently opened a photography studio in Penang and most importantly, he became a self-taught artist who dabbled in oil painting. He used these spaces to showcase his works to the public.

In 1920, Yong was transferred to the branch in Carnarvon Street, Penang. It was his first time in Penang; he saw the lovely island for what it was and was captivated by its beauty and charm. It was in 1922 when he decided to change his name from Yen Lang to Yong Mun Sen and subsequently set up Tai Koon Art Studio in Chulia Street, which was probably the first photographic studio in Penang. He took up photography seriously, using a Leica and Rolleiflex and executed some plaster-of-paris sculptures. Yong used the bookshop as well as the photography studio to showcase his works to the public. Eight years later, he moved his studio from Chulia Street to Penang Road and renamed it Mun Sen Studio which soon became a favourite meeting place for fellow artist- friends namely, Tay Hooi Keat, Kuo Ju Ping, Khaw Sia, Lee Cheng Yong, Abdullah Ariff and other pioneering Malaysian artists. He initiated the formation of the Singapore Chinese Art Club the same year.

## YONG MUN SEN

B. SARAWAK, 1896 – 1962

Dubbed as the Father of Malaysian painting, the late Yong Mun Sen, born on Jan 10, 1896 was one of Malaysia's pioneer artists. The country's art scene is as vibrant and diverse as it is today due to his pertinent contributions. As one of the innovating self-taught artist, Yong left a strong legacy of watercolour and oils.

The artist was born in a coconut estate in Kuching, Sarawak with the forename of Yen Lang. He could have settled for a life of ease, taking over the family business as a wealthy planter but he chose to answer the call of art. Knowing full well that an artist's fate was a journey of toil, challenges and frustration for which there could never be real compensation, he bravely accepted his destiny. In 1901, he travelled to Taipu, in the Guangdong Province of China to attain a formal education in the proper use of brush and calligraphy. Armed with knowledge in the arts, he returned to his hometown in 1910.

### EARLY YEARS

In 1910, Yong's talent and interest in art piqued when he chanced upon a Japanese artist painting using watercolours while treading his family's coconut and pepper plantation and thenceforth, he became enamoured with that medium. Seeing Yong's interest, at that opportune time, a neighbouring Dutchman presented him with a set of watercolours which allowed him to experiment with the medium.

Unfortunately, despite his innate talent and beautiful works, his career in art and photography did not gain him any success which later prompted him to open an additional studio housed in an old mansion in Northam Road. During this time, Yong, with burning passion familiarised himself with the works of prominent European artists through books, particularly those of Van Gogh and Gauguin. Gauguin and his works spoke to Yong, which explains the strong European influence on the development of his style, especially in his oil paintings.

Around 1936, several celebrated Penang artists congregated and in fruition, formed their brainchild, the Penang Chinese Art Club, with Yong as the vice-president and Lee Cheng Yong as president, Quah Kuan Sin secretary, Tay Hooi Keat treasurer and the committee members being Kuo Juping, Tan Seng Aun, Tan Gek Khean and Wan Fee. He became the president the following year. The artist was also an integral part of the formation of Singapore Chinese Art Club the same year. With the onset of the Second World War in 1939, the Penang Chinese Art Club was disbanded, never to be formed again. When the Japanese occupied Malaya from 1941 to 1945, for Yong, this was the most fruitless period of his life. He had to resort to farming for the sake of survival but even then, the love for art never wavered. The streak of misfortune continued when his wife died in 1941. Soon after, he remarried to the beautiful Yao Chew Mooi, the daughter of Yao Swee Lum from Ipoh (a descendant of Kapitan China, Yap Ah Loy). She eventually gave birth to four sons and two daughters. Postwar, Yong got back on his feet and delved into the art scene actively and soon after, opened a photography studio in Penang Road in 1943.

### PORTRAIT OF A NYONYA PERANAKAN 1943

The studio that Yong Mun Sen opened up in Penang Road was popularly patronised for studio photographs. In those days, enlarged photographs needed a lot of delicate touching up and Mun Sen's artistic skills aided him greatly. The artist would frequently paint portraits in a photo matter with army personnel and the affluent, Penang Baba and Nyonyas as his subjects. His works were deemed true to life and exclusive. An example of one Yong Mun Sen's portraiture works is the highly-coveted and rarely seen in public, 'Portrait of a Nyonya Lady', a hand- painted photograph taken at the artist's photography studio which was established in 1922. This painting is a historical testament to this watercolour artist's profession as a proficient commercial photographer and his prowess. In this painting, Yong brilliantly gives his audience a peek into the clientele he received during that period, such as this lady, looking great in her Sunday best and jewelleries, as well as his keen eye in capturing the tones and contours of her face. Henceforth, his works gained him popularity and he became well known through his exhibitions in Malaya and Singapore and also through foreign contacts in Britain, USA and Australia.

In a posthumous retrospective exhibition in 1999 entitled 'The Life of Yong Mun Sen', the guest curator then, Dr Tan Chong Guan emphasised on Yong's career as a painter as well as a photographer. He further elaborated that photography was relatively new in Penang at the time and the artist picked up the art of photography for its commercial potential. That said, it was undeniable that Mun Sen's true love remained in painting. However far he strayed from the medium, he eventually returned to it.

**Portrait Of A Nyonya Peranakan, 1943**  
Hand-painted photography-portrait 26 x 19 cm  
Private Collection



LATER YEARS

In 1955, a solo exhibition of Yong Mun Sen’s paintings was showcased in aid of the Poay Cheng Public School Building Fund. The following year, he suffered from the first of several strokes. Undeterred by his physical infirmity, he struggled on to paint. Although Yong was touted as the first known painter and artist in Malaysian modern art, his life in the later years was burdened with poverty, illness, depression and despair. He died on Sept 29, 1962 from stomach cancer. Both local and foreign patrons collected Mun Sen’s watercolours, including Malcolm MacDonald, the governor-general of British Malaya. Penang Museum and Art Gallery honoured the ‘Father of Malaysian Art’ with a posthumous Retrospective exhibition in 1999. In 1972, the National Art Gallery of Kuala Lumpur organised a Mun Sen Memorial Art Exhibition, which was then succeeded by the Penang Museum and State Art Gallery. 1998 was the year in which an exhibition remembering Yong Mun Sen was held, titled, ‘Father of Malaysian Paintings’ at the Art Gallery in Penang. Next, a retrospective exhibition was held at the Penang State Art Gallery in 1999. Yong’s works will always hold a distinguished place in Malaysian art, as they rightfully deserve. His works are collected by Australia’s Launceston Gallery, the American Cleveland University and John D. Rockefeller University among others.

Yong Mun Sen left behind a remnant of history for the present and future art enthusiasts to remember him by. The great Xu Bei- hong (1895 - 1953), one of the four pioneers of Chinese modern art described Mun Sen as “the most outstanding figure in Malaysian art and one of the few top artists in the tropics.

ARTISTIC PROWESS

With Western impressionism, complemented by Chinese calligraphy aesthetics, Yong garnered aficionados from the US, Australia and the UK. When Yong came across a scene that spoke to his soul, he would swiftly set up his easel and camp stool, equipped with a brush in hand to relay it on the canvas. He did make frequent sallies into oil and Chinese traditional brush painting with success but in the watercolour medium, he excelled.

Yong’s identification of his subjects’ struggles, including fishermen in seaside villages, farmers in paddy fields and labourers in plantations, historic architecture, tin mines took centre stage. A smaller number of paintings dealt with figurative subjects. The artist’s works reflected conscious attempts to integrate the Chinese artistic spirit. The influence of Chinese art resulted in his compositions being airier and more generalised in treatment, revealing a concern for linear properties and surface design.



In a true Yong Mun Sen manner, the artist brought forth the 'Junk Sailing', a pristine piece of work produced in 1947. The artist didn't stray far from his forte, watercolour, and through fluid, carefree motion, he breathed life into this work. This work is minimalistic, drawing attention to the junk sail at its foreground and the landscape surrounding it. The piece was most likely painted in Penang, a place that captivated Yong with its beauty and soon after became his muse. One can't help but be bathed in tranquillity viewing this painting, especially with the fact that a view such as the one in this painting can no longer be seen in the Malaysian landscape and is beautifully documented in this masterpiece by the pioneer artist, Yong Mun Sen.

**junk Sailing, 1947**  
Watercolour on paper 25 x 35 cm  
Private Collection

NOTABLE MALAYAN LANDSCAPE PAINTINGS

KHALIL IBRAHIM

Khalil Ibrahim (1934–2018) was a prominent Malaysian artist known for his evocative landscape paintings that captured the essence of Malaysia’s natural beauty. His work often featured lush, tropical scenery, incorporating vibrant colors and dynamic compositions to reflect the richness from the early Malayan landscape till the current day.

His landscapes are celebrated for their distinctive style, characterized by a fusion of traditional and modern techniques. He had a particular knack for using bold colors and intricate patterns, creating a sense of movement and life within his canvases. His works often include elements such as verdant forests, serene water bodies, and the diverse flora and fauna of Malaysia.

Khalil Ibrahim’s painting “Kota Bharu Boathouses, 1960” is an early masterpiece that captures a specific moment and location in early Malaysian history.

JEHAN CHAN

Jehan Chan is a contemporary artist known for his vibrant and evocative landscape paintings. His works often feature a rich interplay of colors and textures that capture the essence of natural environments in the early Malaccan landscape. Chan’s approach combines traditional techniques with modern interpretations, creating landscapes that are both visually striking and emotionally resonant.

Jehan Chan’s painting of a coastal scene in Malacca is likely to capture the unique beauty and historical significance of this region. Malacca, with its rich cultural heritage and picturesque coastal landscapes, provides a compelling subject for landscape art. Chan’s style often emphasizes vibrant colors and textured brushwork, which can bring the natural and historical elements of Malacca to life.

Jehan Chan has the ability to capture moments of serenity and contemplation. Through his meticulous brushwork and subtle tonal variations, Chan portrays landscapes, seascapes and still-life scenes with a sense of poetic grace. Each painting invites the viewer to pause, immerse themselves in the quietude of the scene, and appreciate the inherent beauty found in the everyday. His watercolour paintings showcases his adeptness at capturing the ephemeral qualities of natural light and its transformative effects on his subjects. Whether it be the soft glow of dawn breaking over a fishing village or the meticulous portrayal of fishing boats, Jehan Chan’s skilful brushwork and delicate washes imbue his artworks with a luminosity that brings each scene to life.

Jehan Chan was born in 1937 in Melaka. He was an outstanding watercolourist and was known for it. The composition of this work provides an expansive view of the fishing village. Viewers are treated to an immense sense of appreciation of Malaysia’s local culture and the subtlety of the work that lets you appreciate it for a longer period.



**Landscape, 1993**  
Mixed media on canvas  
121 x 111 cm



**Fishing Village, 1980's**  
Mixed media on paper  
19.5 x 27 cm



**Coastal Scene - Malacca**  
Mixed media on paper  
13.5 x 18.5 cm

**Seascape, 1962**  
Ink on paper  
55 x 35 cm



**Kota Bharu Boathouses, 1960**  
Oil on canvas  
40.5 x 61 cm



**Untitled, 1933**

Watercolour on paper  
48 x 61 cm

Private Collection



**Figures on a Beach, 1938**

Watercolour on paper  
28 x 38 cm



**Malaysian Ploughing, 1940**

Watercolour on paper  
26 x 38 cm





**Paddy Farmers, 1940**

Watercolour on paper  
28 x 38 cm



**Penang Village, 1940**

Watercolour on paper  
28 x 38 cm





**Bounty from the sea, 1940**

Watercolour on paper  
26 x 38 cm



**Penang Village, 1940**

Watercolour on paper  
28 x 38 cm





**Crossing the River, 1940**

Watercolour on paper  
36 x 52.5 cm  
Private Collection



**Portrait of a Nyonya Peranakan, 1943**

Hand-painted photography-portrait  
26 x 19 cm

Private Collection





**Crossing the River, 1944**

Watercolour on paper  
37.5 x 54.5 cm  
Private Collection



**Paddy Field, 1944**

Watercolour on paper  
28 x 48 cm  
Private Collection





**Malayan Kampung, 1946**

Watercolour on paper  
28 x 38 cm



**Woodland, 1947**  
Watercolour on paper  
26 x 37 cm





**Figure on a Bridge over a River amongst Trees, 1947**

Watercolour on paper  
26.5 x 37 cm  
Private Collection



**Junk Sailing, 1947**

Watercolour on paper

25 x 35 cm

Private Collection





**Malayan Junk, 1947**

Watercolour on paper  
28 x 38 cm  
Private Collection



**Malay Village by the river, 1947**

Watercolour on paper

26.5 x 36.5 cm

Private Collection





**Harbour Scene, 1947**

Watercolour on paper  
25.5 x 35.5 cm  
Private Collection



**Resting, 1947**  
Watercolour on paper  
26 x 37 cm  
Private Collection, Hong Kong





**Palms, 1948**  
Watercolour on paper  
38 x 56 cm



**Fishing Village, 1948**  
Watercolour on paper  
36.5 x 54 cm  
Private Collection, Hong Kong





**Boats, 1949**

Oil on canvas  
60 x 65 cm



**By the River, 1949**  
Watercolour on paper  
38 x 56 cm





**Fishing on the Rock, 1949**

Watercolour on paper  
28 x 39 cm



**Beach Hut, 1949**

Watercolour on paper

25.5 x 35.5 cm

Private Collection





**Chinese Temple - Penang, 1949**

Watercolour on paper  
48 x 36 cm

Private Collection, Hong Kong



**Kampung House by the sea, 1949**

Watercolour on paper

28 x 38.5 cm

Private Collection





**Untitled, 1949**  
Watercolour on paper  
38 x 56 cm  
Private Collection, Hong Kong



**Crab Pots on Rafts, 1949**  
Watercolour on paper  
28 x 38 cm  
Private Collection





**Malay Kampong, Penang, 1950**

Watercolour on paper  
26 x 38 cm



**View of Kedah Peak, 1950**

Watercolour on paper  
28 x 38 cm





**Malayan Junk, 1950**

Watercolour on paper  
26 x 39 cm



**Kedah Peak - Gunung Jerai, 1950**

Watercolour on paper  
27 x 38 cm  
Private Collection





**Malay Fishing Village, Penang, 1950**

Watercolour on paper

27 x 38 cm

Private Collection



**Untitled, 1951**  
Watercolour on paper  
37 x 54.5 cm  
Private Collection, Hong Kong





**Untitled, 1951**  
Watercolour on paper  
62.5 x 48.5 cm  
Private Collection, Hong Kong



**Penang Seascape with Kedah Peak**

Oil on canvas  
55 x 64 cm  
Private Collection





# ABOUT KL LIFESTYLE ART SPACE

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KL Lifestyle Art Space (KLAS) has been a leading force in the promotion of modern and contemporary Malaysian art since the gallery's inception in 2011. It has actively served as a platform for art masters and modernists to showcase their glorious artworks as well as provide art collectors and enthusiasts an expansive space to fully enjoy the beauty of Malaysian art. KLAS auction activities have meanwhile made us a transitional home to many artworks as the commercial space has encouraged a secondary market for artworks by senior artists and masters in Malaysia, and by some major regional masters which have exchanged hands through us.

What sets us apart from the conventional galleries is that we are highly dedicated not solely to featuring the art itself or highlighting the credentials of the artists, but we conjointly give our utmost commitment to educating the audience on the provenance of the artworks and the background of the artists as well as provide our experience and observation when coming across their magnificent masterpieces.

KLAS continuously aspires to set new standards for the presentation of art in the country. Despite our many successes in past auctions, we do believe that there is still much room to propel the local art scene to similar heights achieved by numerous of our Asian neighbours: Philippines, China, India, Indonesia, as well as Singapore. The paramount purpose and backbone at KLAS is to advance the country's visual art scene alongside, or possibly, surpass those of our neighbours.

## KLAS MILESTONE

KLAS first opened its commercial gallery space at Tropicana City Mall in February 2011. As an art mover, we endlessly find ways to improve in terms of providing a prime space where our audiences are able to wholly appreciate art. Therefore, subsequently opening a flagship art space in Jalan Maarof in September, the same year. In August 2015, KLAS moved to Jalan Utara to a purpose built full- fledged gallery specially designed by the founder and chief executive officer, Datuk Gary Thanasan. The gallery aims to present art in a 'mini' international art museum environment which has encouraged countless art galleries in the country to raise the bar, forging its standards to be at par with international standards. The gallery's interior is spacious with an atmosphere that emits a contemporary, calming feel due to its minimalistic build. The open, serene space allows viewers to whole-heartedly appreciate the artworks on display, thus, giving them an aesthetically pleasing experience.

Fast forward to KLAS in 2022, where it has opened its gallery again at its flagship outpost at 150, Jalan Maarof, under the banner of KLAS Plus. Beaming with freshness, KLAS Plus' design is the idea of an urban oasis, a space where the pace of art-exhibition can be further appreciated. KLAS converses with the locale's bustling and thriving neighbourhood. The building itself nestles comfortably within its contemporary context, offering surprising tactility, detail, and depth up close that betrays the familiar and the everyday. Intimately surrounded by trees and clear sunlight gives the gallery a strong sense of natural surroundings. The clean walls feed into the rhythm of the arrangement of painting and the consideration of creating intimate spaces where individuals can enjoy the artwork quietly. Beautifully designed KLAS PLUS has personality of its own, but doesn't steal the thunder of the artists on display.

## ABOUT KL LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

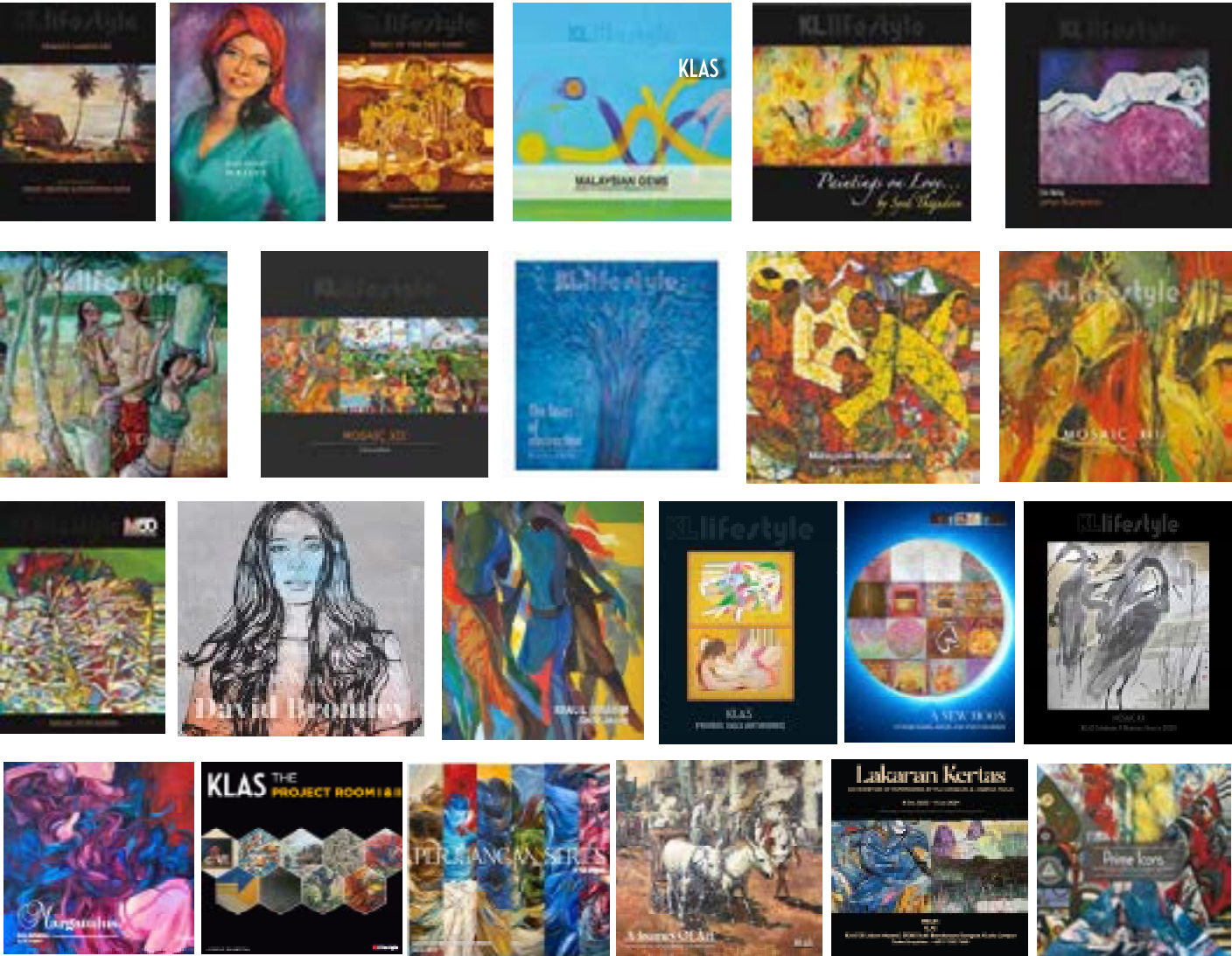
Apart from the gallery, KLAS is affiliated with a lifestyle magazine, KL Lifestyle, which is owned by the parent company Mediate Communications Sdn. Bhd. Mediate was established in the year 2000, and acquired KL Lifestyle in 2007. KL Lifestyle has taken the lead since 2010 in being the only magazine in Malaysia to dedicate six to ten of its pages on Malaysian and Southeast Asian art on a monthly basis.

Apart from promoting art, the magazine serves as an ultimate guide for city dwellers and travellers alike. Packed with information on all essentials for the best city experience, providing readers with colourful information from sights and sounds to international gastronomical flavours to be found in the city. An indispensable monthly guide to Kuala Lumpur, dedicated to being the one-stop reference to happenings, dining, shopping and places to relish.



# KLAS ART EXHIBITION

2011 - 2024







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In Collaboration with KLAS Fine Art Gallery

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Presented by

**KL** lifestyle

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