

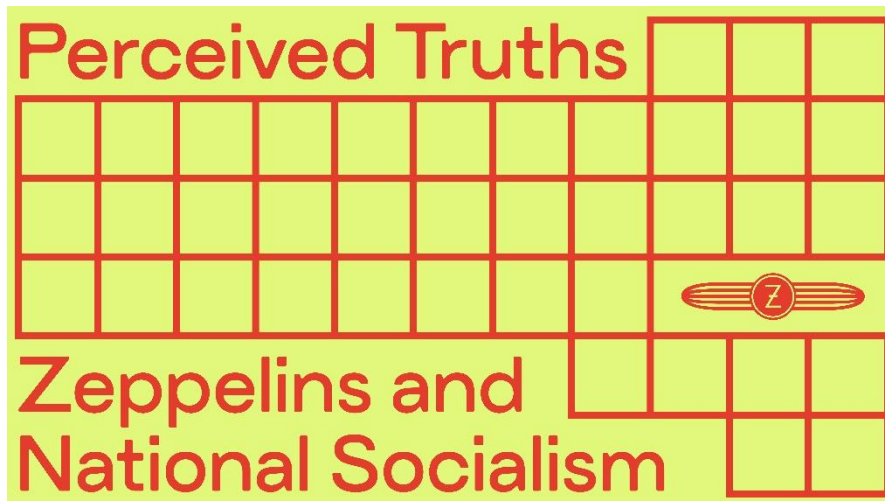
Detailed Press Release – Special Exhibition

# Perceived Truths. Zeppelins and National Socialism

May 22, 2026 – April 4, 2027

Press conference: Wednesday, May 20, 2026, 11 am

Opening: Thursday, May 21, 2026, 6 pm



In 2026, the Zeppelin Museum celebrates its 30th anniversary in the “Hafenbahnhof”. The museum takes this occasion as an opportunity to turn to its own history through the exhibition “Perceived Truths. Zeppelins and National Socialism,” reappraising the entanglements between the political use of Zeppelins and Nazi Germany.

Central to the exhibition are so-called “perceived truths”, a phenomenon based on subjective, emotionally shaped assumptions: statements that we have heard somewhere and never questioned, which have solidified over time and consistently replace verifiable facts. They run throughout the exhibition and the museum as a guiding thread, serving as a framework for deconstructing romanticized narratives surrounding Zeppelin history.

## Press information

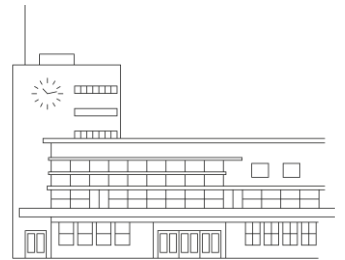
April 16, 2026

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Zeppelin Museum

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[www.zeppelin-museum.de](http://www.zeppelin-museum.de)

#zeppelinmuseum

## Opening hours

May–October:

Mon–Sun, 9am–5pm

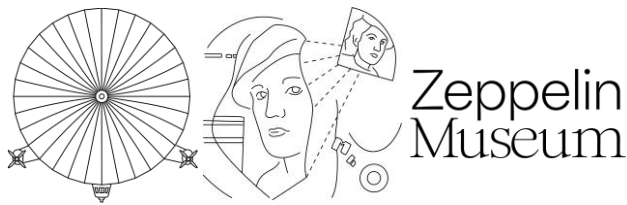
November–April:

Tue–Sun, 10am–5pm

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“Perceived truths” continue to shape the image of the Zeppelin to this day, casting them as a nostalgically romanticized technology. One persistent belief, for example, is that Zeppelins and the companies that built them were “apolitical”. Yet whether during the German Empire or the Weimar Republic, Zeppelin airships were already heavily ideologically or politically charged, long before the Nazi regime. The museum is frequently confronted with the claim the companies in Friedrichshafen, including its employees, were apolitical or even viewed unfavorably by Nazi Germany. One of the main arguments used to exonerate Zeppelin airship travel after the Second World War is its alleged rejection by the Nazi regime itself. Even the self-constructed image of Hugo Eckener, which to this day is reinforced and perpetuated, displays him as a consistent opponent to, or even a resistance fighter against National Socialism. This is also part of these *perceived truths* that portray the Zeppelin as an apolitical and harmless technology.

Latest research on the role of the Zeppelin during Nazi Germany paints a different picture: the so-called golden age of airship travel with LZ 127 *Graf Zeppelin*, LZ 129 *Hindenburg*, and its sister ship LZ 130 *Graf Zeppelin II*, was strongly shaped by their significance in Nazi propaganda. The methods of propaganda ranged from the painting of swastikas on the large tail fins of the airships to appearances at the Nuremberg Rallies, the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin and other major political events. From 1933, the Zeppelin airships represented the Nazi regime even during their scheduled passenger-carrying flights to Brazil and the United States, thus becoming ambassadors of a supposed German-national technological superiority. From then on, Zeppelins and the people involved in building or operating them were, in one way or another, integrated into Nazi Germany and played a part in its propagandistic self-representation. The notion that this happened completely involuntarily and unenthusiastically is an example of a sentimentalized narrative that emerged after 1945 and continues to have an impact to this day. As a result, a fact-based view of the Zeppelin has been obscured, and overlaid with predominantly positive associations. These “perceived truths” ignore historical contexts and their political dimensions. They rely on familiar, and in some cases historically distorted narratives. Tales of an “apolitical technology” or an “involuntary” integration of the company into the Nazi propaganda apparatus still shape both self-perception and external representation of the industrial town and armament center that is Friedrichshafen.

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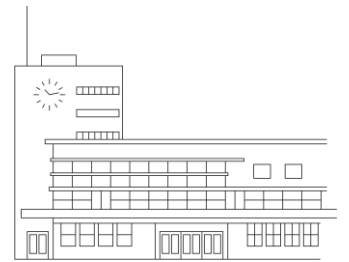
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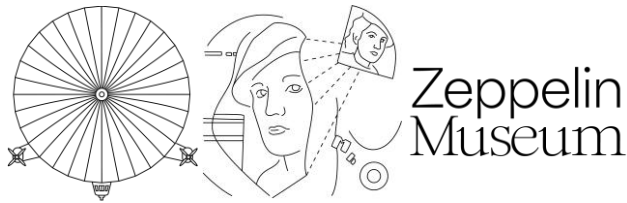
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For this reason, the Zeppelin Museum adopts a clearly defined “glocal”, multi-perspective, and interdisciplinary approach to the new exhibition, linking broad historical contexts within a reflection of local corporate history. Within this framework, the museum’s own collection is continually being critically examined, aiming at confronting “perceived” narratives with historical research and practices of Remembrance Culture. By concentrating on key figures and key events, this “glocal” perspective becomes tangible.

The exhibition thus offers a differentiated view of the Nazi era (1933-1945) within a longer period of historical continuities. It traces gradual political shifts and radicalizations in society, that much like today, seem to be everywhere. Exposing these mechanisms and deconstructing embellished narratives and omissions is the central aim of the exhibition.

## Contextualization and Reassessment

This takes place on several levels. On the one hand, education and mediation play a central role in offering methodological approaches to historical interpretation as well as to contemporary discourses on media literacy, Remembrance Culture and political education. On the other hand, historical research is conducted on a “glocal” level, enabling the presentation of new findings.

The identified **key events** can be traced back to before the Nazi period. As early as the German Empire, the German Zeppelin airships benefited from being politically and emotionally charged. During the First World War, they served as bombers and for reconnaissance both as military tools and symbolized imperial ambitions. The first scheduled transatlantic air travel service was established during the Weimar Republic. It embodied a distinctly German claim to global relevance through technological progress. Their international appeal as well as their ability to be used as blank canvases for imposed symbols made them valuable tools for Nazi Germany’s propaganda purposes. This introductory focal point of the exhibition therefore examines the influence of National Socialism on the company and its operations, on the political staging of the Zeppelin, as well as on the employees and passengers.

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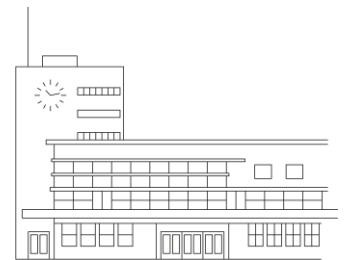
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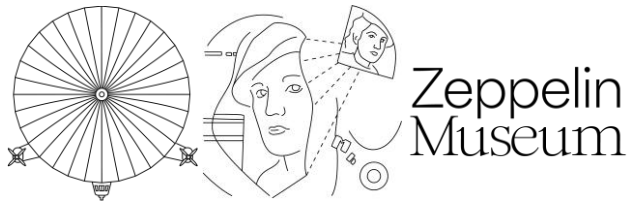
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The **propaganda flights** are an additional focal point of the exhibition. They reveal the role of the Zeppelin within Nazi Germany and their entanglement within it. Subject of this focus and key events in the historical reconstructions are namely the propaganda flights of LZ 127 *Graf Zeppelin*, LZ 129 *Hindenburg*, and its sister ship LZ 130 *Graf Zeppelin II* over the Nuremberg Rallies in 1933 and 1936, during the “Day of National Labor” in 1933, the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936, the 30-hour election propaganda flight and the so-called Sudetenland flight as part of the violent crushing of Czechoslovakia in 1938.

A decisive key event, the **Lakehurst** disaster on May 6, 1937, has been given its own focal point. With the destruction of LZ 129 *Hindenburg*, not only did an airship go up in flames, but also a symbol of Nazi Germany, which had promoted the Zeppelin as a masterpiece of German engineering. The ceremonial transfer of the victim’s remains and their burials were staged by the regime in line with a National Socialist “cult of sacrifice.” Their funerals took place with military honors and state symbols were omnipresent: wreath ribbons from various Nazi organizations and dignitaries are now part of the Zeppelin Museum’s collection and will be on display in the exhibition.

The museum’s own history is also critically examined. The corporate museum of the Luftschiffbau Zeppelin GmbH plays a central role. Newly built on the occasion of Count Zeppelin’s 100<sup>th</sup> birthday it opened in 1938. The museum was exploited during the Nazi dictatorship to revive the Count as a national and military role model on the one hand, and to promote the narrative of technological progress surrounding the Zeppelin on the other. Both the predecessors and successors of this museum have operated within the tensions between municipal and industrial political interests. At the museum level, the conflicts between opposing interpretive frameworks and their inherent “perceived truths” are still reflected to this day. In its educational content, the Zeppelin Museum addresses questions concerning the relevance of museums today.

In addition to focusing on key events, the museum also approaches this process of dissecting its past through **key individuals**. For within a very short period of time, the National Socialists permeated all areas of society, including the Luftschiffbau Zeppelin GmbH. Stories about individual employees up to top management figures are used to exemplify continuities and changes under the

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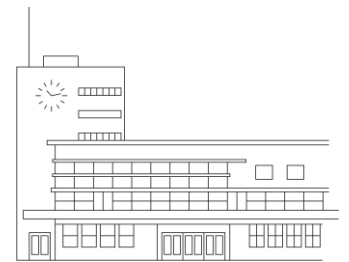
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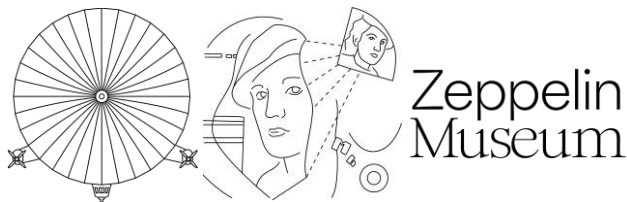
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dictatorship. From this perspective, structural transformations brought about by the Nazi regime, as well as the fundamental elements of the dictatorship at company level, can be examined. A reassessment of Hugo Eckener's story, which was previously largely based on his own autobiography, undertaken by the Konstanz-based historian Jürgen Klöckler will also be presented for the first time.

Around 200 exhibits will be on display, most of which are from the museum's own collection. A particular focus lies on historical photographs and archival materials, some of which will be displayed publicly for the first time in the form of reproductions. These are made accessible in a transparent and traceable way by leafing through sheets. To this end, numerous archives, in particular the Bundesarchiv as well as the Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg and many more, have digitized certain documents, some for the first time, and made them available to be shown in this exhibition. These materials are complemented by prestigious loans from the Endrass family, the Stadtarchiv Friedrichshafen and Sylk Schneider.

The exhibition "Perceived Truths. Zeppelins and National Socialism" sees itself committed to historical and civic education, focusing on strengthening digital media literacy. In light of the current shift in society and threats against democracy and peace in Europe, the Zeppelin Museum regards civic education as a central pillar of its work. In this context, the exhibition specifically aims to link the undergone historical research to contemporary political discourse.

## Art and educational content

A critical examination of historical materials with the use of images and media is also reflected in the artistic work of Jonas Englert, made possible by RESEARCH, the ZF Art Foundation's research grant. The multi-channel video installation *CULT [Zeppelin]* (2026) deconstructs the Zeppelin as a blank space open for projection and collective images, especially those exploited by National Socialism, such as notions of national sentiment, superiority and masculinity. It reflects on the enduring influence of inherited modes of thought beneath the surface of mere images, as well as their past and legacy up to the present day. Englert assembles heterogeneous visual materials, including explicit propaganda, into a network of ideological narratives, projections, and

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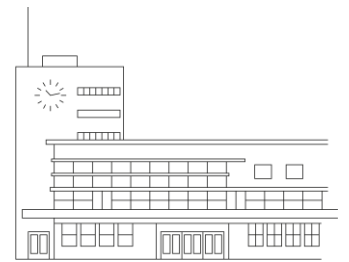
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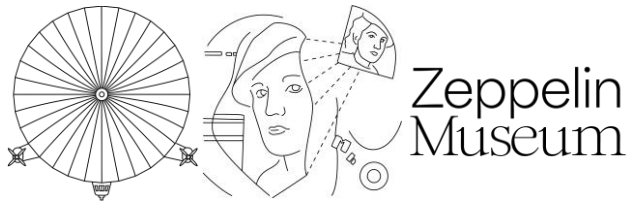
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suppressed memories. In doing so, the artist opens up a space for reflection in which images and their “perceived truths” as well as the notion of fascism as a closed chapter in history, can be critically questioned.

Englert’s media-critical approach is taken up in the exhibition’s educational program which equips visitors with essential (media) skills for engaging with the past through a source-critical and remembrance cultural approach. This therefore continues into the present, drawing parallels to mass experiences and targeted influence exerted through modern media.

In both exhibition areas the exhibition begins with an inclusive prologue that combines digital media and tactile objects: “An die Vergangenheit herantasten...” (Feeling one’s way toward the past) presents an overview of key historical events alongside a series of tactile images that quite literally make the need for source-critical contextualization and the principle of “perceived truths” tangible. The prologue is complemented by the museum’s inclusive podcast “Sag mir, was du siehst!” (Tell me what you can see). The “if-station” accompanies the entire exhibition as a meta-station. Sections such as “If it’s everywhere...,” “If it sounds true...,” and “If you (don’t) belong...” place the fundamental function of perceived truths in a historical context and make it interactively accessible. Here, the comprehensive ideology of National Socialism is also presented in relation to its political and legal consequences; propaganda is methodically deconstructed, and group dynamics are made tangible through processes of inclusion and exclusion.

In addition to that, videos are distributed throughout the exhibition, in which visitors can encounter life-sized specialists with expertise in history, civic education, Remembrance Culture and media education. They provide discipline-specific insights into how and which “perceived truths” are present in their everyday work, and how they engage with them.

An interactive learning station can be found on both the ground and upper floors. Here, the exhibition provides insights into key concepts of political and media education: what are filter bubbles, baits, thirst traps, cognitive dissonance, or the so-called confirmation bias? How do they influence our media perception on the Internet? In addition, the museum offers digital applications created by cooperation partners such as the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, the

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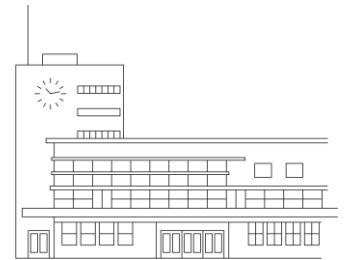
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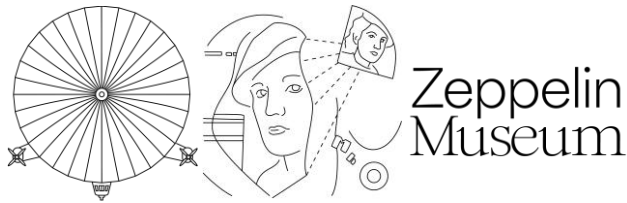
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Bildungsstätte Anne Frank and the University of Jena, all aimed at strengthening visitors' overall media literacy.

All texts in the exhibition are presented, as usual, in both German and English. A supplementary glossary is provided alongside the curatorial texts in an accompanying booklet written in *Einfacher Sprache* (plain language).

The accompanying program is oriented toward the curricula of the county of Baden-Württemberg and focuses its educational approach on target groups aged 16 and above. The museum is continuing its successful lecture series OPEN HOUSE as well as the recently established format OPEN HOUSE ONLINE. Among the invited speakers are author Sebastian Herrmann, historian Jürgen Klöckler, Martin Cüppers from the Forschungsstelle Ludwigsburg, Anke Hoffsten from the NS-Dokuzentrum München, Berit Kö from the University of Jena, Marcus Stiglegger from the University of Mainz, Mick Prinz from the Amadeu Antonio Foundation, Céline Wendelgaß from the Bildungsstätte Anne Frank, and Iris Groschek from the Gedenkstätten Hamburg. Two film screenings and a joint guided tour with the Schulmuseum Friedrichshafen through both museums will take place.

Whilst developing the exhibition, Friedrichshafen was selected to be the venue for the 5<sup>th</sup> Historical Conference "Historisches Wissen und gesellschaftlicher Bildungsauftrag am Beispiel des Nationalsozialismus in Südwürttemberg" (Historical knowledge and the social educational mandate using the example of National Socialism in South Württemberg), which will be held on June 17 and 18, 2026, at the Zeppelin Museum. The conference is organized by the Forschungsbereich für Geschichte der Medizin am Zentrum für Psychiatrie Südwürttemberg / Klinik für Psychiatrie und Psychotherapie der Universität Ulm in Ravensburg-Weissenau and the Denkstättenkuratorium NS-Dokumentation Oberschwaben in cooperation with the Zeppelin Museum Friedrichshafen. The city of Friedrichshafen serves as a patron.

To mark the opening of the exhibition, a comprehensive accompanying publication will be issued, documenting new findings and aiming to stimulate further research.

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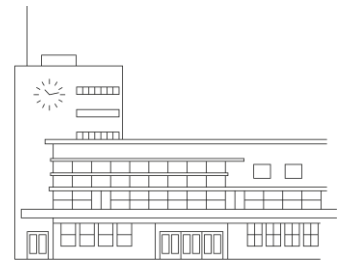
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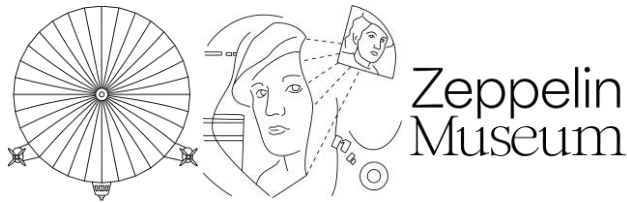
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The exhibition design was created in collaboration with Berlin based Kooperative für Darstellungspolitik. The exhibition's key visual element is the grid, as a means of sorting, structuring, assigning and reordering.

**Curators:** Jürgen Bleibler, Felix Banzhaf, Kathrin Wurzer, Dominik Busch, Dr. Tabea Widmann

**Exhibition coordination:** Felix Banzhaf

**Funded by:** Kulturstiftung der Länder, ZF Kunststiftung, Lotto Museumspreis 2024



**Media partnership:** SWR Kultur



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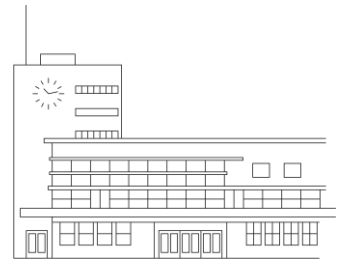
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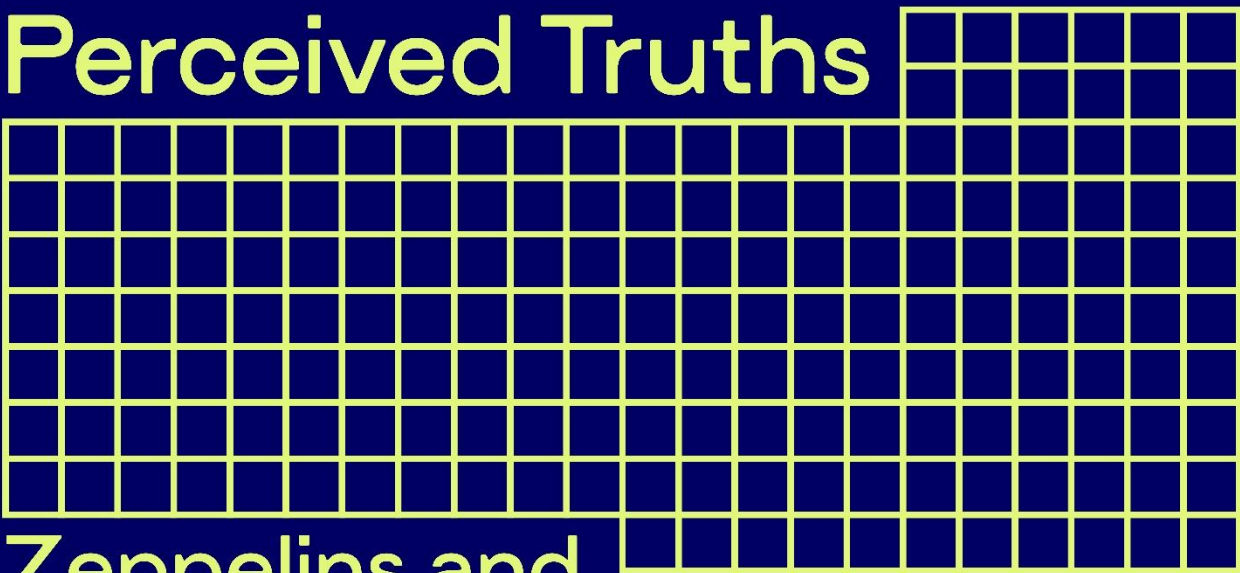
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# Perceived Truths



## Zeppelins and National Socialism



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All Images:

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