

# December 2024 Edition

## MUSEUM AND EVENT PREVIEWS

COUSE-SHARP HISTORIC SITE | OPEN THROUGH FEBRUARY 28, 2025 | TAOS, NM

# Broadening Viewpoints

A new Bert Geer Phillips exhibition is now on view at the Couse-Sharp Historic Site in Taos, New Mexico.

By John O'Hern

The story of Bert Geer Phillips' arrival in Taos is a classic one here in Northern New Mexico. He, Joseph Henry Sharp, Ernest L. Blumenschein and Eanger Irving Couse were students at the Académie Julian in Paris in the 1890s. Blumenschein and Phillips, who shared a studio in New York, were so fascinated by Sharp's tales of the West that they set out in a covered wagon in 1898 on a painting trip from Colorado to Mexico. On a rutted road just north of Taos, a wagon wheel broke. Phillips stayed with the wagon (after a coin toss) and Blumenschein took the broken wheel on horseback to be repaired in town. Both decided to stay in Taos to paint. Phillips fell in love with a local girl and stayed on. Blumenschein later returned to New York.



**Bert Geer Phillips (1868-1956),** *Our Washerwoman's Family – New Mexico* is at left, *The Santero* in the center. To the right are art objects in *The Santero*. Vestment chest attributed to Manuel Lorenzo Valdez (1752-1795) and workshop in Velarde or Taos, New Mexico. Courtesy of Museum of International Folk Art, museum purchase. A.1959.11.1. *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, ca. 1840, by José Rafael Aragón (1796-1862) in Pueblo Quemado (now Córdova, NM). Courtesy Museum of International Folk Art, Bequest of Charles D. Carroll, A.1971.31.60

The story of Phillips' painting of Hispano subjects (among his best paintings) and his relationship with that community, is the subject of the exhibition *Vecinos y Amigos: Bert Geer Phillips and His Neighbors*, on view through February 28, 2025, at the Couse-Sharp Historic Site in Taos.

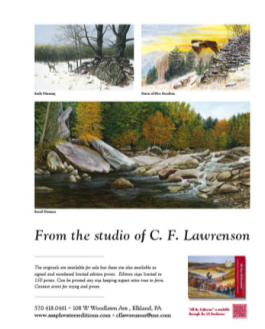
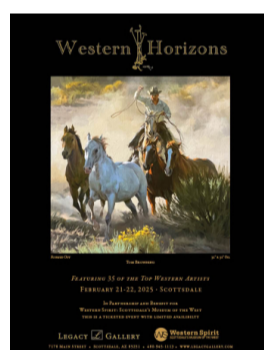
It is being shown in the Lunder Research Center at the museum. The site's executive director and curator, Davison Koenig, says, "Our exhibition seeks to expand our knowledge of the context of those few paintings in which people in the Hispanic community modeled, to identify them, and to enrich Bert's stories with theirs. We're fortunate that it's also a beautiful show featuring some of his best work, as well as key objects and archival material."

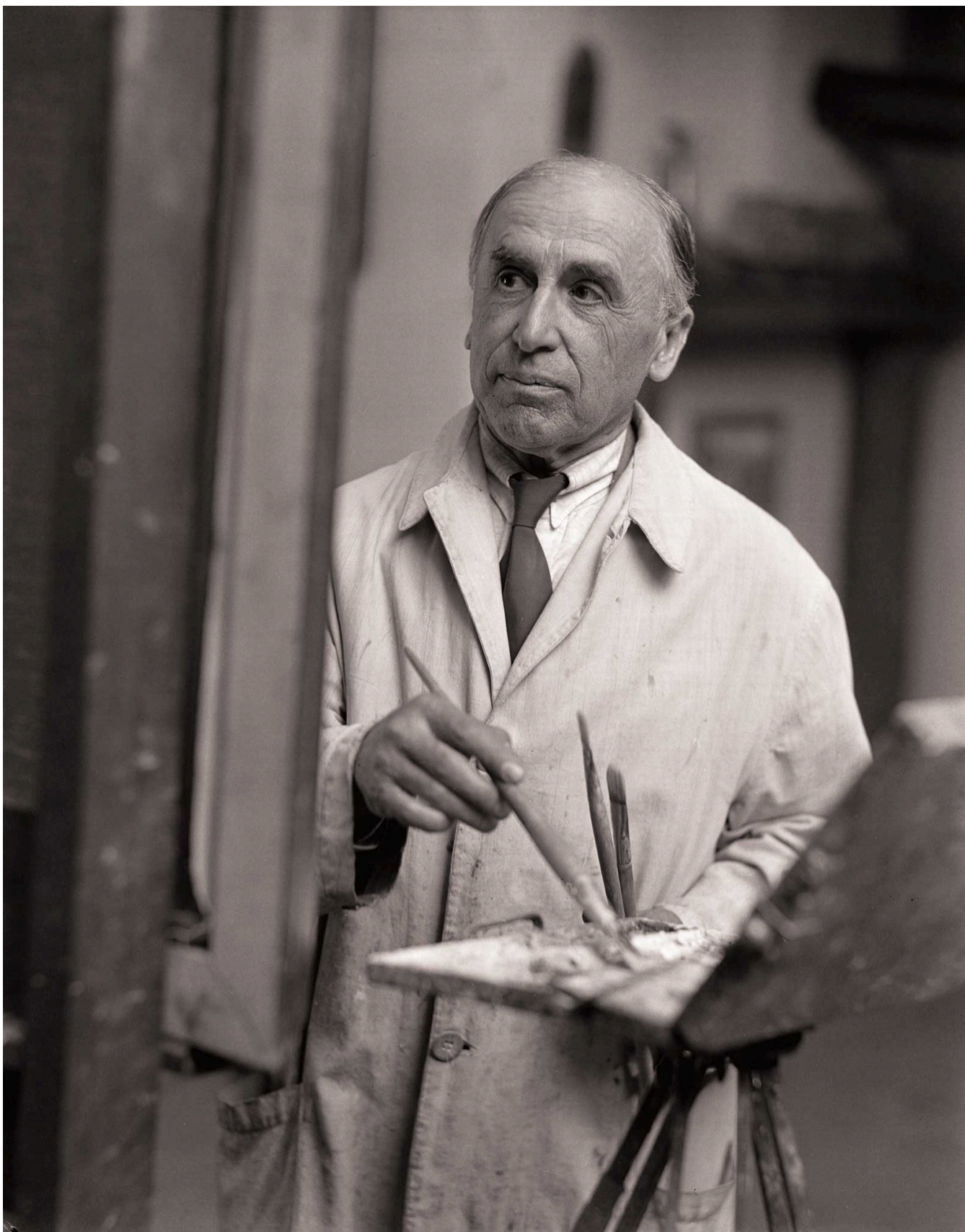
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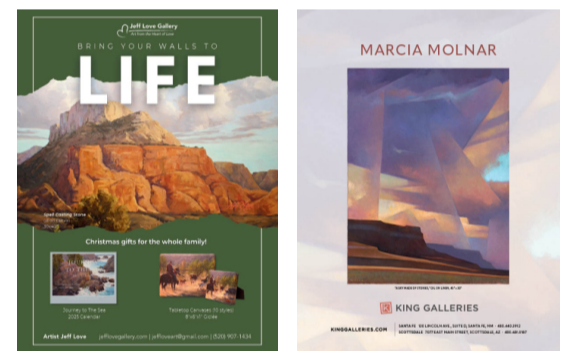




**Will Connell (1898-1961),** *Photo portrait of Bert Phillips in his studio in Taos, New Mexico, 1932.* Courtesy of University of California, Los Angeles Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library.

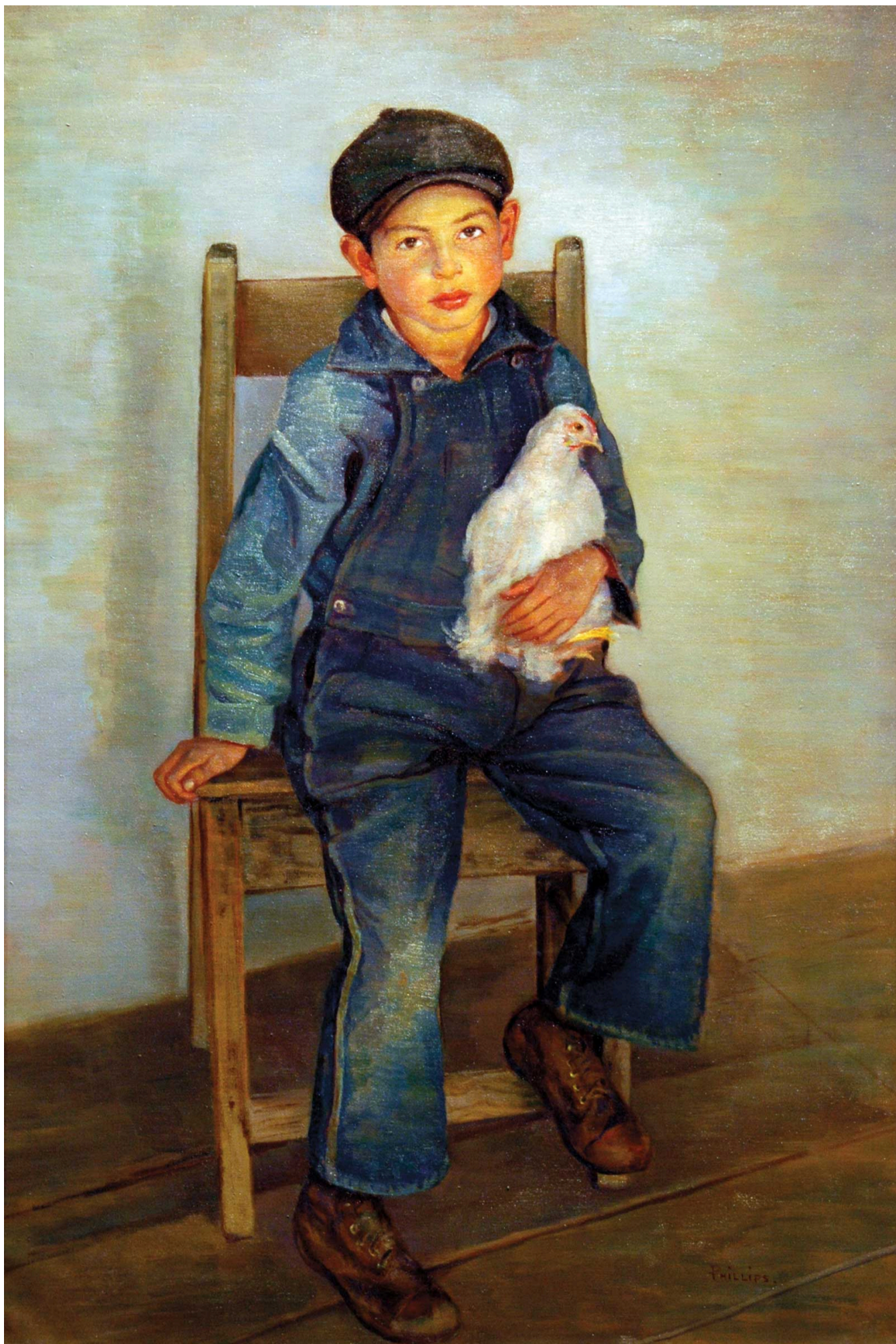
Phillips, Couse, Sharp and Blumenschein were founding members of the Taos Society of Artists in 1915.

Guest curator, James C. Moore, director emeritus of the Albuquerque Museum, writes, "Paintings of Hispanic subjects are rare within the work of the TSA. Research into the models' families and recognition of who they were allows a new understanding of Bert's working method and greater insight into how paintings were conceived to fit the existing market—and appeal to the stereotypes held by potential buyers."



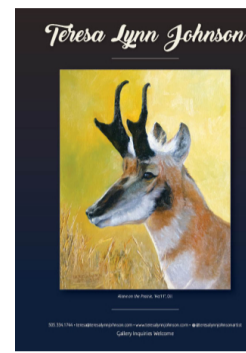
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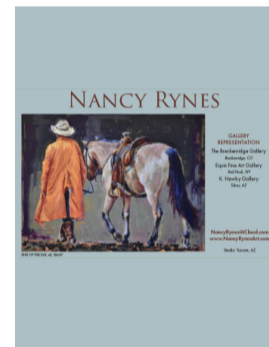
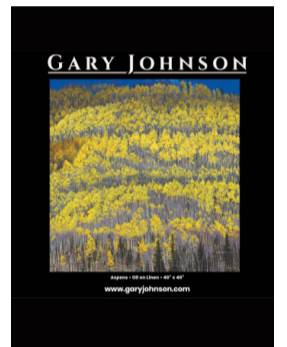


**Bert Geer Phillips (1868-1956), *Lady, Please Buy One Chicken*, 1935, oil on canvas, 38 x 25½ in. Courtesy of Albuquerque Museum, Albuquerque High School Collection, 1985 General Obligation Bonds.**

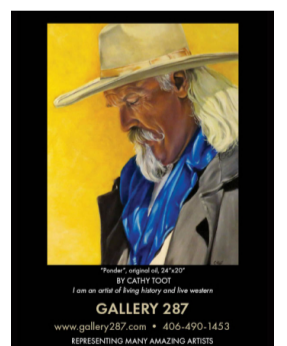
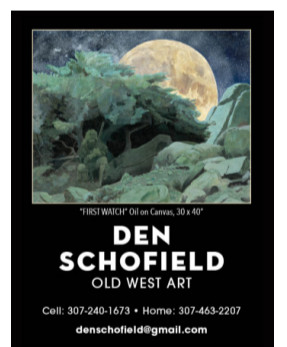
Preconceptions and stereotypes about the Hispano and Indigenous people of Taos were common at the time and, unfortunately, are common today, as is an understanding of the complexity of the history of the region. Koenig says, "Knowing these people gives significance to those who have long been anonymous, broadening our view of the larger social dynamic of Taos."



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**Bert Geer Phillips (1868-1956)**, *Our Washerwoman's Family* – New Mexico, ca. 1918, oil on canvas, 40½ x 415/8 in. New Mexico Museum of Art. Gift of Governor and Mrs. Arthur Seligman, before 1930, 537.23P.



**Bert Geer Phillips (1868-1956)**, *Three Musicians of the Baile*, ca. 1920-1921, oil on canvas, 39½ x 42 in. Collection of the New Mexico Museum of Art. Gift of Governor and Mrs. Arthur Seligman, 1929 (329.23P). Photo by Addison Doty. A facsimile of the painting is on view in this exhibition.

An explanatory panel in the exhibition recounts Phillips' initial response to Hispano culture: "Like most Anglo-Americans who moved to New Mexico in the late-19th century, Phillips did not initially have a good rapport with the Hispano community, and he held negative stereotypes regarding 'Mexicans' that were common in mainstream parlance. Within months of his arrival, he and Lester Meyers set off a notorious incident on Taos Plaza on December 12, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, when the two refused to remove their hats to honor the procession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Phillips and Meyers were temporarily jailed, and the ensuing fights resulted in the death of Sheriff Luciano Trujillo."



**Bert Geer Phillips (1868-1956)**, *Taos Valley, N.M.*, ca. 1915, oil on canvas, 15¾ x 1911/16 in. Gift of Robert Desky, 1981.16. Harwood Museum of Art of the University of New Mexico.

Koenig relates that after the incident Phillips began taking Spanish lessons.

Among the many researchers for the exhibition, Moore was, perhaps, the most dogged. The vestment chest in Phillips' painting *The Santero*, circa 1918, came from the Ranchos Church, was bought by Phillips and, it was thought, ended up at the Palace of the Governors in Santa Fe. When Moore inquired about the chest he found it wasn't there. He continued his search and, shortly before the exhibition opened, he located it at the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe.



**Bert Geer Phillips (1868-1956), *The Santero*, ca. 1918, oil on canvas, 30 x 26 in.** Courtesy of American Museum of Western Art— The Anschutz Collection. Photo by William J. O'Connor.

*Vecinos y Amigos* is an example of how the Lunder Research Center can bring together scholars, vecinos and amigos to expand our awareness of the art and cultural history of northern New Mexico. —

### **Vecinos y Amigos: Bert Geer Phillips and His Neighbors**

Through February 28, 2025

Couse-Sharp Historic Site

146 Kit Carson Road, Taos, NM 87571

(575) 751-0369, [www.couse-sharp.org](http://www.couse-sharp.org)

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