

## ART REVIEW



Photo by Harold Strout

Serafim Yssolo, "O manto da Sabedoria (The Mantle of Wisdom)"



Photo courtesy of Zero Station

From Grace DeGennaro's "Rose Moon Series"

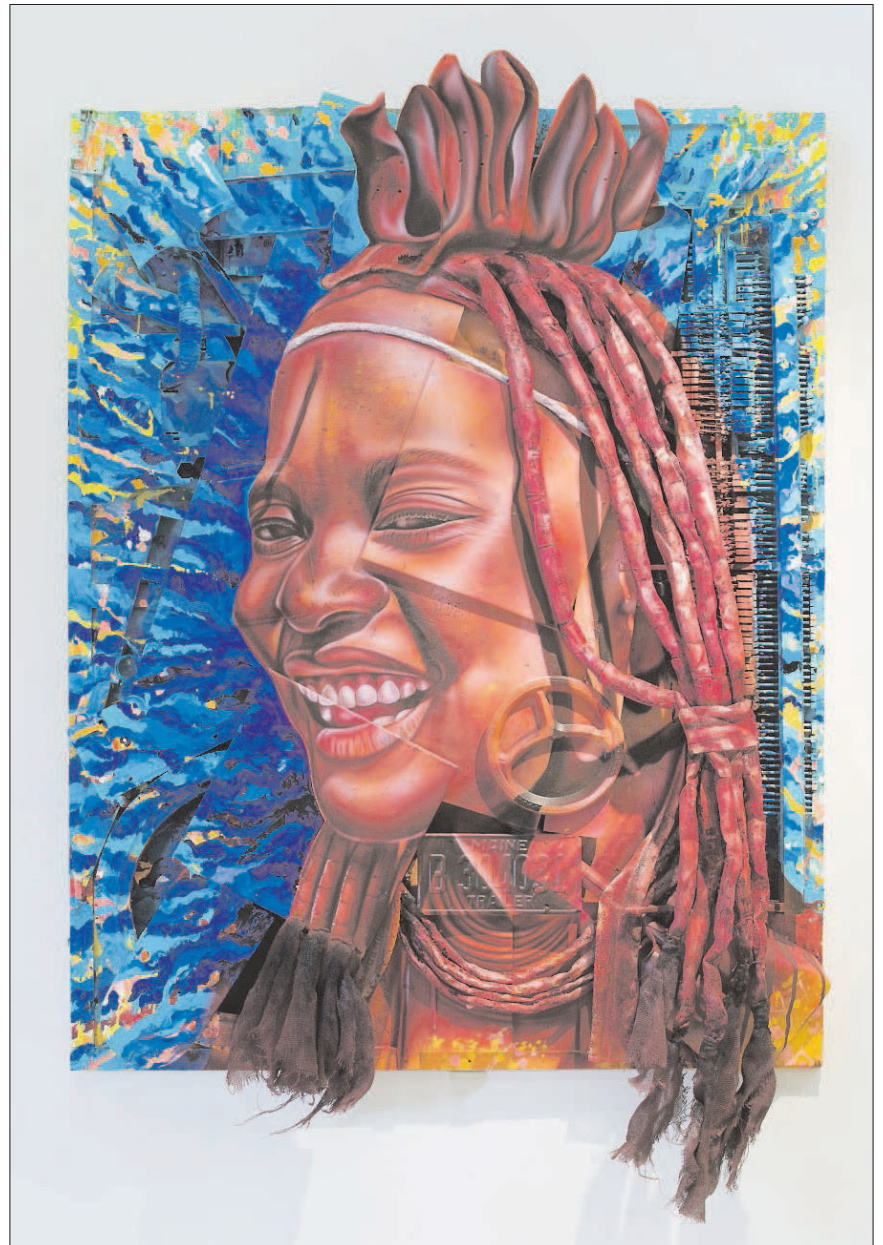


Photo by Harold Strout

Serafim Yssolo, "Um jet simples de see... (A Simple Way of Being...)"



Photo courtesy of Zero Station

Grace DeGennaro, "Snakeskin" and "Bare Attention"

## Two painting shows to see now – one orderly and controlled, the other full of raw energy

Grace DeGennaro's works are at Zero Station Gallery in Portland, and L/A Arts in Lewiston is hosting 'Serafim Yssolo: Life on Scraps.'

By JORGE S. ARANGO

Grace DeGennaro's paintings and those of Angolan artist Serafim Yssolo could hardly be more different.

DeGennaro's are based on control, symmetry and sacred geometry. Yssolo's explode with spontaneity, painted found objects and heroic portraits of real and imagined personages.

You can see these wildly different results at "Continuum: an installation of paintings by Grace DeGennaro" at Zero Station Gallery in Portland (through April 27) and "Serafim Yssolo: Life on Scraps" at L/A Arts in Lewiston (through May 17).

You can also see (and feel) some connecting threads between them, including the importance and dynamism of color (albeit applied in completely different ways), as well as subtle spiritual content that might not be readily apparent on first viewing.

DeGennaro is acclaimed for her myriad variations of colored dot paintings. The suite of works at Zero Station incorporates the color theory of Josef Albers with rigorous mathematics involving Fibonacci sequencing (where each number is the sum of the two previous numbers) and the golden ratio (1 to 1.618, a cosmic constancy that is perfectly harmonious and repeated throughout nature and the universe).

Let's deem DeGennaro's methodology little more than a

chilly mathematical exercise, we should remember that this last component, the golden ratio, has deep connections to nature and profound implications throughout the universe. We can find the golden ratio in the patterns of living things – a nautilus shell, pinecones, the human body, ocean waves, spider webs – all the way up to the topology of time-space and the fact that the golden ratio describes the ways constituent parts of whole galaxies relate to one another. Some hypothesize that this ratio determines the way galaxies actually form.

Using all these touchpoints, DeGennaro applies thousands of dots, creating a sense of metronomic rhythm that feels alive and dynamic like the passage of time. The regularity this sort of rhythm creates can feel like a form of visual chanting. Certainly, the further we dive into these works, and contemplate the artist methodically applying dot after dot, the more we can feel transported to a meditative state in a way similar to viewing an Agnes Martin painting.

It is also fascinating to note how the character of the dots changes when they are applied in the same order and color (with occasional slight variation) on different color grounds, as is the case with DeGennaro's "Rose Moon Series." They were inspired, as the title implies, by a rose moon, which occurs in June and which she encountered on a hike. During the experience, the artist noted how the various shades of the moon kept fluctuating.

The wall of 10 identical or near-identical color dot compositions on various ground colors creates the sense of this shifting of hues within a single phenomenon. You will swear they are

all different in terms of the dot colors. But look closely and you understand that they are not, that it is the color of the grounds – which shift from cream and yellow to bright fuchsia and deepest indigo – that affect how we read the colors of dots, which either pop out at us or fade into the background shade. Extrapolated exponentially to a cosmic scale, this can suggest the infinite variability of things within an eternal constant.

Yet all is also not as regimented and perfect as it seems. We can observe in most works – particularly "Sufficiency," where the straight grids take on a wavy-edged appearance – the presence of the artist's hand. In order to conform to her preset geometry, we find DeGennaro making certain rows of dots smaller and smaller so as not to interrupt the overall harmony of the pattern. No matter how exacting and fastidious her calculations, the fallibility of human endeavor is a fact. This has all sorts of allusions to spiritual concepts of vulnerability and surrender.

On a purely aesthetic level, many of these works also recall weaving (a more precise practice) or patterns suggested by their titles, such as "Snakeskin."

### CAST-OFFS AS HEROIC ART

There is no such subtlety and mathematical formulation in Yssolo's work. In fact, it seems at the exact opposite end of the spectrum. DeGennaro's colors are variously modulated, where Yssolo's look mostly dipped and applied right out of the can. DeGennaro's compositions are repetitive, regimented and void of specific content, while Yssolo's are figurative works literally formed from junk piled onto board, primed with a coat of white, and painted over with a

### IF YOU GO

**WHAT:** "Continuum: an installation of paintings by Grace DeGennaro"  
**WHERE:** Zero Station, 222 Anderson St., Portland  
**WHEN:** Through April 27  
**HOURS:** 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Friday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday  
**ADMISSION:** Free  
**INFO:** 207-347-7000, zerostation.com

**WHAT:** "Serafim Yssolo: Life on Scraps"  
**WHERE:** L/A Arts, 168 Lisbon St., Lewiston  
**WHEN:** Through May 17  
**HOURS:** 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday, noon to 6 p.m. Friday  
**ADMISSION:** Free  
**INFO:** 207-782-7228, laarts.org

portrait of a known person (i.e. Bob Marley) or a mythological figure ("The Goddess of Blackness").

There is a raw, visceral energy to Yssolo's works. This is his first U.S. gallery show. He still lives in Angola and is applying to come to the U.S., where his partner lives and works. At the opening, an interpreter was hired to facilitate conversations he conducted in his native Portuguese. Unfortunately, a language barrier affects the exhibition materials, which suffer from a lack of intelligibility. It's clear they were translated from Portuguese (wall texts appear in both English and Portuguese) and rather awkwardly at that. Sentences in many cases don't actually make sense.

What we can discern, however, is Yssolo's thematic concerns are also spiritual. He sees the ti-


tle of the show, "Life on Scraps," through a many-faceted metaphorical lens. It is obviously a life condition he has experienced on one level. On another, it is about the mounds of scraps and garbage that humans toss out, polluting our environment. On still another level, the flotsam and jetsam are a metaphor for the stuff of life that overwhelms and blocks us from our innate spiritual nature.

Each painting is accompanied by a poetic text, which, again, is at times completely opaque because of translations that don't understand the cadence of English. (I suspect the Portuguese ones are quite easy to read and grasp.) These texts expound upon the abstract intangibles of the figures. "The Goddess of Blackness," for instance, proclaims:

"Yes, I am the Goddess of your blackness and the Goddess of your eternal humanity 'without color.' The poetry that my eyes distill is to reclaim the value that each beat of the heart's traits of our excellence as human beings deserves, not a battle fought in an invisible field of insensitivity by those who also feel the same pain if a stone falls on their foot or bleeds if a knife cuts their finger."

OK. I vaguely got what this was about – a world without racial concepts, just valued human lives – but a lot is lost, I suspect, in translation. What is more immediate is the assemblage of objects on the board and the skill of translating a face onto a surface with so many depths and planes that could destroy its legibility.

Among the detritus Yssolo mounds onto, screws into and otherwise affixes to his substrate are: a radiator, a whole bank of piano hammers, ice



# DEEP WATER

MAINE POEMS

Edited and introduced  
by Megan Grumbling

This week's poem, Ben Boegehold's "Fool's Spring," recalls a shiny boyhood stone – not true gold, but beloved – and meditates on the long Maine wait for true spring. I love this poem's imagery of light and greens and golds, and its tender appreciation for the beauties and promise within the wait.

Boegehold is a poet and teacher living on Mount Desert Island. His work has been published in this column, the Cincinnati Review and the Stonecoast Review, as well as in several anthologies. He also has work forthcoming in the Cider Press Review. When he's not writing, he's usually doing some crazy project on his house, walking in the woods with his toddler daughter or sea kayaking on the coast.

## Fool's Spring

By Ben Boegehold

when we were kids my brother  
had a piece of pyrite he treasured it

he kept it in the cubby near his bed  
we knew it wasn't gold but still

we'd bring it out and marvel  
at the way it glittered in the light

the way the sun reflected  
off each tiny facet

ancient people used to strike  
their blades against it sparking

fires in which they offered up  
lambs and oxen to the gods

today the sun glints off the ice  
that flecks the little stream nearby

my wife and I take down  
our box of seeds and sort them

once again like prospectors  
we dream of greens and golds

of a summer garden even  
as the temperature drops

and the sap retreats while last year's  
leaves swirl in the wind

yet still we go on counting  
the days until last frost

striking steel against this fool's  
spring to see what sparks ignite

Megan Grumbling is a poet and writer who lives in Portland. Deep Water: Maine Poems is produced in collaboration with the Maine Writers & Publishers Alliance. "Fool's Spring," copyright 2023 by Ben Boegehold, appears by permission of the author.

# What Beyoncé's 'Cowboy Carter' means to the Black Opry

By EMILY YAHR  
The Washington Post

In the final moments of a Black Opry Revue show, where a traveling rotation of singer-songwriters take turns playing their individual songs and sharing the stories behind them, the singers like to gather for a group performance. During their show in the Washington area just over a week ago, the choice for the final song was obvious.

"Well, happy Beyoncé Day," said Roberta Lea to cheers from a sold-out crowd at the Barns at Wolf Trap in Vienna, Virginia – coincidentally on the same day that Beyoncé released her new country-themed album, "Cowboy Carter." Lea noted that she and the members of the Black Opry – a collective of Black country artists, fans and industry professionals – had talked about the significance of when "a superstar like Beyoncé steps into the country music space and what it means for people that look like her, which are people like us."

"And so," Lea continued, "we felt like it was just fitting to do a little something in honor of the queen." Grace Givertz launched into the jaunty banjo introduction, Rachel Maxann jumped in on piano, and along with Sug Daniels and Tylar Bryant, they all sang the track that recently became the first song by a Black woman to go No. 1 on Billboard's Hot Country Songs chart: "This ain't Texas, ain't no hold 'em – so lay your cards down, down, down, down. ..."

From the moment Beyoncé surprise-dropped "Texas Hold 'Em" and "16 Carriages" during the Super Bowl in February, the online discourse about her plans to "go country" went into overdrive: Music scholars offered history lessons about the Black roots of the genre, which has historically excluded many Black singers. Fans analyzed the 2016 Country Music Association Awards performance in Nashville when Beyoncé sang "Daddy Lessons" with the Chicks, an incident that Beyoncé implied inspired the album because she "did not feel welcomed" in that environment. And of course, the endlessly exhausting debates about what constitutes "authentic" country music.

Through it all, a common theme also surfaced, especially among Black singer-songwriters who are already in the country music world: No matter how you feel about "Cowboy Carter," this is a historic moment. Not only is Beyoncé using her enormous platform to deliver an artistic statement and raise the profile of other Black country artists, the highly-hyped album could help reframe the way audiences feel about the genre in general.

"There are so many Black people



Photos by Shedrick Pelt for The Washington Post

Now that Beyoncé has sparked a conversation about the country music world – and featured legends such as Willie Nelson on her new album – it could open up the format to more listeners, says Grace Givertz.



"It's so American. It's so Black American music," Roberta Lea says about "Cowboy Carter."

who are like, 'I can't talk about the fact that I really get down to Willie Nelson.' ... There are so many people, because of the racism, who are like,

"Country music? I would never," said Givertz during a conversation backstage with the five Black Opry members who traveled to Virginia for the concert. But now, she said, given that Beyoncé has sparked a conversation about the country music world – and featured legends such as Nelson on the album – it could open up the format to more listeners.

"We make this music because we love it," Daniels added. "But it's exciting to see the rest of the world turn their head and be like, 'Ooh – what else is going on over here right now?'"

### HIT 'PLAY'

Listening to "Cowboy Carter" the day it came out was a thrilling experience for the Black Opry singers before the Wolf Trap show: Givertz said she hit "play" at 6:30 a.m. and started crying about 45 seconds into the record. Maxann went on a joyful run in Malcolm X/Meridian Hill Park and described herself as "smiling and happy, saying 'Happy Beyoncé Day'"

Please see **BEYONCÉ**, Page E5

# calendar

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** It's possible events have been canceled after this listing was compiled. To submit a listing, go to [pressherald.com/calendar](https://pressherald.com/calendar). Contact information is provided with each event online.

## BOOKS & AUTHORS

**Author Talk:** Marie Thérèse Martin, free, Lewiston Public Library, 200 Lisbon St., Lewiston, lplonline.org, 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 10.

**An Evening with David Sedaris,** \$47-\$62, Merrill Auditorium, 20 Myrtle St., Portland, porttix.com, 7 p.m. Sunday, April 14.

## COMEDY

**Comedian Rob Stant,** \$20-\$60, Maine House Of Comedy, 77 Free St., Portland, eventbrite.com, 7 p.m. Friday, April 12.

**Dan LaMorte,** \$25-\$30, Great Falls Comedy Club, 34 Court St., Auburn, greatfallscmedyclub.com, 7:30 p.m. Saturday, April 13.

**Laugh Sanctuary** with Chris Post and Uzair Malik, \$20, First Parish UU Church, 425 Congress St., Portland, eventbrite.com, 8 p.m. Saturday, April 13.

## FESTIVALS & FAIRS

**Reggae Festival,** times varied, Sugarloaf Mountain, 5092 Access Road, Carrabasset Valley, eventbrite.com, Thursday, April 11, and April 12-14.

**2024 Kora Sportsmen Expo,** free, Kora Shrine Center, 11 Sabattus St., Lewiston, korashriners.org, 4-8 p.m. Friday, April 12, and April 13 and 14.

## FILM

**Reframing Historic Arctic Films,** free, Kresge Auditorium, Bowdoin College, 239 Maine St., Brunswick, bowdoin.edu, 7 p.m. Thursday, April 11.

**Reframing Historic Arctic Films,** free, Barry Mills Hall, M129 Cinema, 12 Polar Loop, Brunswick, bowdoin.edu, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, April 13.

**Buster Keaton silent movie,** with jazz pianist and entertainer Adam Swanson, free, Woodfords Church, 202 Woodford St., Portland, woodfordschurch.org, 3 p.m. Sunday, April 14.

**"Born in Chicago"** film showing followed by live concert with Blues Prophets, \$20-\$24, The Hill Arts, 76 Congress St., Portland, thehillarts.me, 2 p.m. Sunday, April 14.

## MUSIC

**Augusta Symphony Orchestra Spring Concert,** free, Cony High School Auditorium, 60 Pierce Drive, Augusta, augustasympphonymaine.org, 6 p.m. Sunday, April 7.

**KindKids Music Spring Sing,** \$5-\$15, Chocolate Church Arts Center, 804 Washington St., Bath, chocolatechurcharts.org, 2 p.m. Sunday, April 7.

**Louise Bichan: Photography and Music,** \$0-\$35, presented by BAAM, The Gem Theater, 48 Cross St., Bethel, thegemtheater.com, 1 p.m. Sunday, April 7.

**Heather Pierson and the Pot-boilers,** Cadenza, 5 Depot St., Freeport, eventbrite.com, 4 p.m. Sunday, April 7.

**Qwanqwa,** \$15, Space Gallery, 538 Congress St., Portland, space538.org, 8 p.m. Sunday, April 7.

**Looking Forward Colby Wind Ensemble,** free, Colby College, Gordon Center for the Creative, 4000 Mayflower Hill, Waterville, arts.colby.edu, 5 p.m. Sunday, April 7.

**East Bayside Bluegrass collective,**

free, Maine Craft Distilling, 123 Washington Ave., Portland, 207-209-0362, 7 p.m. Tuesday, April 9.

**Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain,** \$35-\$55, Merrill Auditorium, 20 Myrtle St., Portland, portlandukulele.org, 7 p.m. Tuesday, April 9.

**Adam Swanson,** World Champion Old-Time Piano Player, Congregational Church in Cumberland, 282 Main St., Cumberland, cumberlanducc.org, 7 p.m. Thursday, April 11.

**PEI's Gordon Belsler & Cynthia MacLeod** in concert, Old South Church, 235 Main St., Farmington, eventbrite.com, 7 p.m. Thursday, April 11.

**The Tannahill Weavers,** Cadenza, 5 Depot St., Freeport, eventbrite.com, 7 p.m. Thursday, April 11.

**Buddy Guy** – Damn Right Farewell, \$65-\$100, State Theatre, 609 Congress St., Portland, 7 p.m. Thursday, April 11.

**Josephine Foster with Colby Nathan,** \$15, Space Gallery, 538 Congress St., Portland, space538.org, 8 p.m. Thursday, April 11.

**The Portland Jazz Orchestra,** \$15-\$20, featuring Cape Elizabeth High School, One Longfellow Square, 181 State St., No. 201, Portland, onelongfellowsquare.com, 8 p.m. Thursday, April 11.

**Gone Too Soon,** The Ultimate Michael Jackson Experience, \$30-\$45, Augusta Civic Center, 76 Community Drive, Augusta, 7 p.m. Friday, April 12.

**Jacob Jolliff Band,** The Opera House at Boothbay Harbor, 86 Townsend Ave., Boothbay Harbor, boothbayoperahouse.com, 7:30 p.m. Friday, April 12.

**Cousin Curtiss,** Stone Mountain Arts Center, 695 Dugway Road, Brownfield, stonemountainartscenter.com, 8 p.m. \$65-\$100,

Friday, April 12.

**DaPonte String Quartet Concert Series II,** \$30, Meetinghouse Arts, 40 Main St., Freeport, dapontequartet.org, 7 p.m. Friday, April 12.

**Small Ensembles Concert Spring 2024,** Olin Arts Center, 75 Russell St., Lewiston, eventbrite.com, 7 p.m. Friday, April 12.

**Hinterlands,** \$15-\$22, Mayo Street Arts, 10 Mayo St., Portland, tickettailor.com, 7 p.m. Friday, April 12.

**DaPonte String Quartet Concert Series II,** \$30, Nordica Hall, University of Maine, 246 Main St., Farmington, dapontequartet.org, 4 p.m. Saturday, April 13.

**John John Brown,** \$15-\$20, Chocolate Church Arts Center, 804 Washington St., Bath, chocolatechurcharts.org, 7:30 p.m. Saturday, April 13.

**The Jacob Jolliff Band,** Stone Mountain Arts Center, 695 Dugway Road, Brownfield, stonemountainartscenter.com, 8 p.m. Saturday, April 13.

**United States Army Field Band & Soldiers' Chorus,** free, Lawrence Senior High School, Williamson Arts Center, 9 School St., Fairfield, 207-453-4200, ext. 2332, 7 p.m. Saturday, April 13.

**DaPonte String Quartet,** \$0-\$20, Nordica Auditorium, 224 Main St., Farmington, artsfarmington.org, 7:30 p.m. Saturday, April 13.

**Adam Swanson,** Cadenza, 5 Depot St., Freeport, eventbrite.com, 7 p.m. Saturday, April 13.

**Jackson Dean: Head Full of Noise Tour,** \$25-\$35, Aura Maine, 121 Center St., Portland, 8 p.m. Saturday, April 13.

**Louisa Stancioff – Album Release,** \$15-\$17, Oxbow Blending & Bottling, 49 Washington Ave., Portland, oxbowbeer.com, 7:30

Please see **LISTINGS**, Page E5

## ART

Continued from **Page E2**

skates and skate parts, vacuum tubes, egg cartons, tools, circuit boards and computer parts, hub caps, a pitchfork, takeout food containers, manufacturing garbage from the mills, shoe trees and flip flops, tin cans, bike tires, a shovel, a soccer ball, parts of skateboards, a mannequin arm, vent covers, a lamp ... and on and on.

There is something direct and unvarnished about the humble materials that feels very real, very street and very resourceful. The faces are not all interesting, particularly those that look like makeup-heavy beauties. The contemporariness of how they are rendered, with their luxuriously mascaraed eyelashes and lipstick ("The Face of Pleasure," "Queen of the Wrappings of the Winds") look commercial in the manner of a magazine ad, which feels flashy and slick in a way that injects an aspect of commercial graphic art that is at odds with the deeper spiritual dimensions Yssolo is trying to articulate.

The best are "A Simple Way of Being..." and "The Mantle of Wisdom." The woman in the former doesn't look like a supermodel (as in the subjects of "The Face of Pleasure" and "Queen of the Wrappings of the Winds"). Instead, somehow she embodies her title – relaxed, without self-consciousness or pretension, smiling genuinely and openly, and exuding a no-frills, simple life. Several tresses of her hair (made from rolled up window screen and tied at intervals) cascade out in front of the canvas, giving her an intriguing dimensionality.

Like "Simple Way," "Wisdom" feels closer not only to its title, but also to the underlying sense of dignity with which Yssolo is trying to imbue these figures, a dignity that goes beyond their carriage and extends to their essential, more intangible value as beings beyond human constructs.

Not everyone will like this work. Honestly, I'm not sure I do. But I can certainly appreciate its rawness and the way it monumentalizes (these are very large) common human figures. It is precisely their too-muchness – their size, their teeming surfaces, their garish colors – that forces you to stop and consider Yssolo's larger aims. If these assemblage paintings are not as subtle and cerebral as DeGennaro's works, they certainly have a tremendous amount of energy and heart, and a certain dynamism that seems worth our contemplation.

Jorge S. Arango has written about art, design and architecture for over 35 years. He lives in Portland. He can be reached at: [jorge@jarango.com](mailto:jorge@jarango.com)