



CHARLES EDE

Modelle Archa

40

MAN RAY
31 bis, RUE
CAMPAGNE
PREMIERE
PARIS XIV°



Man Ray (American, 1890-1976)

Portrait of Aïcha Goblet (1898-1972) wearing a Paul Poiret turban, July, 1922

Gelatin silver print

17.5 x 12.7 cm

Inscribed in ink by the artist 'Le modele Aïcha', numbered '40', and stamped in ink with photographer's credit 'MAN RAY/31bis,RUE/CAMPAGNE/PREMIERE/PARIS XIVE' (on the reverse)

Provenance:

Private Collection, UK

Christie's, London, 7th May 1999, lot 286

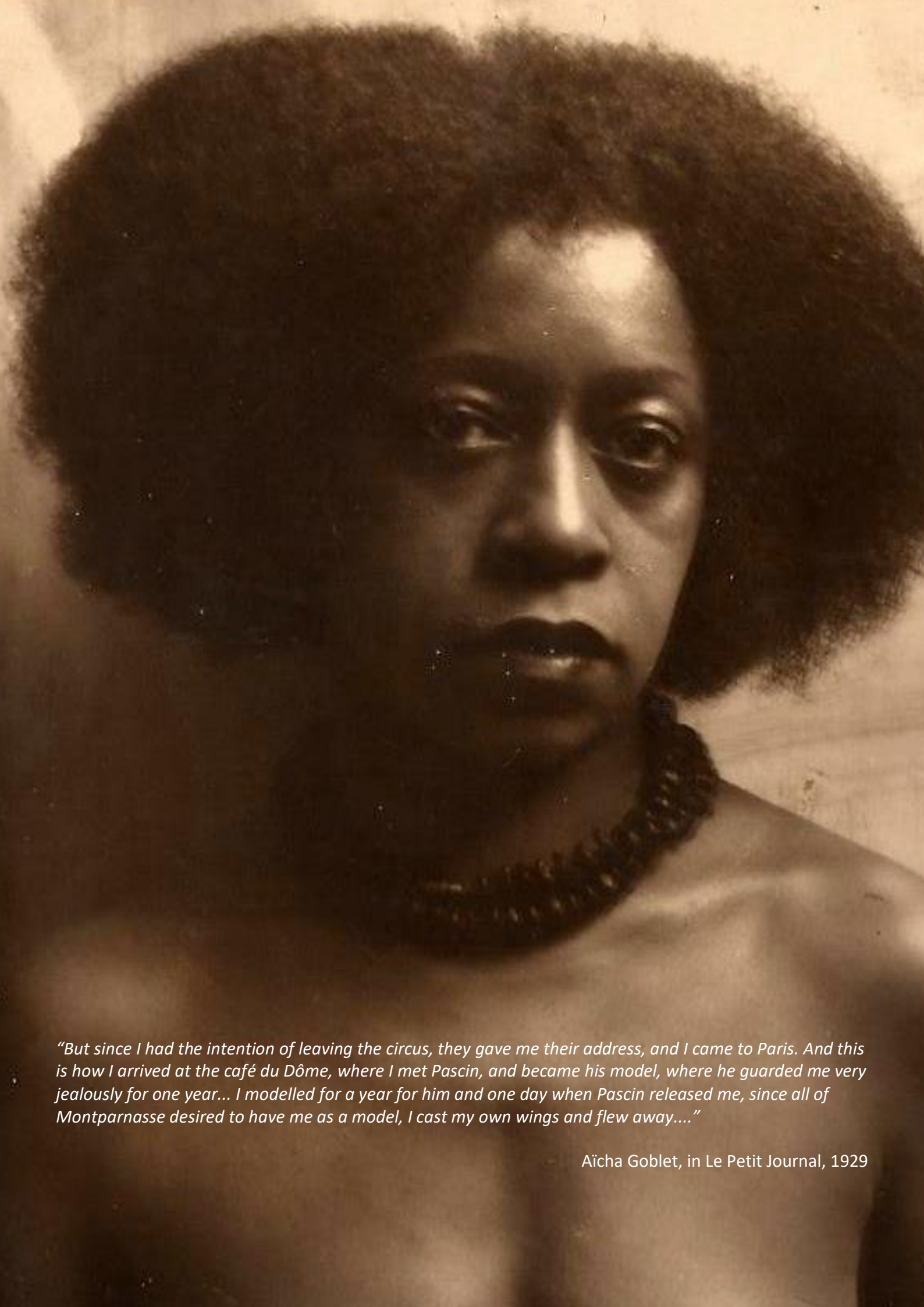
Private Collection, France

Artcurial, Paris, 14th November 2004, lot 85

Private Collection, France, until 2024

"Ayesha wears a turban over her woollen pate. A coal black negress from Martinique, she sits for the artists, and stoutly maintains that she is an American. She carries an imitation gold cardcase, and all her cards are magnificently scalloped with gilt edges and painted with forget-me-nots. They are engraved with one word, 'Ayesha'."

Marjorie Howard, *Vanity Fair*, 1914



"But since I had the intention of leaving the circus, they gave me their address, and I came to Paris. And this is how I arrived at the café du Dôme, where I met Pascin, and became his model, where he guarded me very jealously for one year... I modelled for a year for him and one day when Pascin released me, since all of Montparnasse desired to have me as a model, I cast my own wings and flew away...."

Aïcha Goblet, in *Le Petit Journal*, 1929



"No modern painting auction at Hôtel Drouot is complete without a representation of this Martiniquais from the Batignolles."

Montparnasse, G. Fuss-Amoré and M. Desormiaux, 1925

Aïcha: Muse, Model, and the Forgotten Face of Modernism in Paris

This rare photographic print by the celebrated artist Man Ray is a striking portrait of Aïcha Goblet, an iconic Black female figure of the early 20th century and a prominent artist's model in Paris during the Roaring Twenties. Captured at the height of her fame and at the beginning of Man Ray's photographic career, this image is not only visually captivating but also a fascinating document of the era. As one of the leading models of early 20th century Paris, Goblet was a close friend and equal of Kiki de Montparnasse (1900-). She was a significant figure for Black women in the modern era, pioneering the way for other models and artists of colour, such as Josephine Baker, Adrienne Fidelin, Julien Luce, and Simon Luce, known as D'al-Al.

During this time, Paris was a hub of artistic experimentation and intellectual exchange, but it was also a place where the legacies of race and colonialism profoundly influenced cultural production. This era marked a complex juncture where celebrity, identity, race, and sex were all shaped by new public attitudes and an ever-evolving, dynamic social structure. The artistic and intellectual landscape was deeply entwined with colonial histories, which both challenged and reinforced notions of identity and 'otherness'. This image stands as a testament to that complex period, reflecting the intricate layers of cultural interaction, and appropriation, for both artists and their muses and models.



Edgar Chahine (1874-1947), *Portrait de Aïcha*, c. 1920, Pastel on paper, Paris, Musée arménien de France
 Moïse Kisling (1891-1953), *Portrait de Aïcha*, c. 1920, Oil on canvas, Private Collection

In recent years, the role that women of colour played in shaping the avant-garde modernist movement in Paris during the inter-war years has been under-documented. Goblet has largely been forgotten today, and despite the numerous portraits of her by well-known artists, there is very little biographical study of her role, or indeed, of her peers. However, with the re-evaluation of works of art such as the present photograph, accounts of Black personalities who were once overlooked in the history of Modernism are gradually being integrated into the historical narrative. This has been made possible by ground-breaking exhibitions and critical publications, such as Denise Murrell's *Posing Modernity, Le Modèle Noir* at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris in 2019, Wendy A. Grossman's essay on Man Ray's muse and lover Adrienne Fidelin in 2020, and importantly, Michael Fabre's article on Aïcha herself, "Rediscovering Aïcha, Lucy, and D'al-Al: Colored French Stage Artists."

Madeleine Julie Goblet, born to a Martinican father and a French mother, became a symbol of the complex expressions of identity and diversity related to skin colour, and attitudes toward women in early 20th century Paris. Though she is less well remembered today than contemporaries like Kiki de Montparnasse or Josephine Baker, she paved the way for them as the first Black female celebrity in modern France. Adopting the name Aïcha, she sometimes styled herself as a princess and wore a turban, which added to her enigmatic persona.

Born in Hazebrouck, northern France, before the turn of the century, Aïcha Goblet grew up in a working-class family with a circus-performing father from Martinique. At just six years old, she began performing as a bareback rider, and by sixteen, she had moved to Paris to model for the artist Jules Pascin. After a year under his tutelage and as his exclusive model, she moved to Villa Falguière, residing alongside renowned artists such as Chaim Soutine, Amedeo Modigliani, Moïse Kisling, and Tsuguharu Foujita. She would occasionally prepare meals for them and lend them money from her modelling income. Known as *Le Venus du Montparnasse*, she posed for artists including Kisling, Henri Matisse, Kees Van Dongen, and Modigliani. Foujita created a nearly Cubist portrait of Aïcha, featuring her with a long cigarette holder, a billowing Afro hairstyle, and lips resembling an African mask. However, the most iconic representation of her is Vallotton's, capturing her standing majestically, with bare shoulders, hands clasped together, and the same

signature Paul Poiret turban she wears in the present photograph, which she became well known for. In their 1925 book *Montparnasse*, G. Fuss-Amoré and M. Desormiaux noted her fame as an artist's model stating, "No modern painting auction at Hôtel Drouot is complete without a representation of this Martiniquais from the Batignolles."



Man Ray (1890-1976), *Portrait of Aïcha Goblet (1898-1972) wearing a Paul Poiret turban*, July, 1922
Gelatin silver print (the present work)
Felix Vallatton (1865-1925), *Aïcha*, 1922, Hamburg, Kunsthalle de Hambourg,

Aïcha recalled her arrival in Paris: "At that time, I was working in a circus in Clamart. One day, at the exit of the big top, Pascin approached me and asked me if I wanted to be his model. But I was totally ignorant of what I had to do to be a model. But since I planned to leave the circus...Pascin gave me his address. I arrived at the Café du Dôme, where I found him. And then for month after month, Pascin guarded me jealously. In Montparnasse, they didn't even know whether I spoke French because Pascin didn't let anybody have contact with me. For almost a year, I posed only for him. But one day, since all the painters of Montparnasse wanted me as a model, I went out on my own."

Aïcha's Parisian career blossomed as she transitioned from modelling to stage performance in the early 1920s, dancing nearly naked at the Olympia music hall and acting in plays such as *L'hôtel des masques* and *Le Simoun*. Her performances often highlighted her exoticism and grace, though she was sometimes criticized for being more celebrated for her physical presence than her acting talent. Her captivating presence inspired the character Cora in André Salmon's novel *La Nègresse du Sacré-Coeur* (1920), and she appeared in several films. In Eugène Deslaw's *Montparnasse, poème du café-crème* (1929), she starred alongside Foujita and Luis Buñuel. She is also believed to be one of the two Black women dancing in plant-fiber loincloths and bare-chested in *Le Bal de la Horde* (anonymous documentary, 1926), amidst a parade of artists in blackface, reflecting the era's complex and often problematic engagement with race and identity.

By 1926, she had moved to rue Jules-Chaplain and became the muse of painter Samuel Granovsky. Despite her prominence in Montparnasse's artistic circles, her fame waned by the mid-1930s. She continued to

frequent Parisian cafés and recount her experiences to journalists, culminating in a brief article with nude photographs in *Mon Paris*. Aïcha Goblet's final stage appearance was in 1935. After moving from Montparnasse to Montmartre, she lived quietly until her death in 1972 at her Parisian home on rue Lamarck.



Jeanne Tercafs (1898-1944), *Portrait d'Aïcha Goblet*, c. 1934

Following page: Man Ray (1890-1976), *Peggy Guggenheim wearing Paul Poiret*, gelatin silver print, 1925(?)



Man Ray and Aïcha Goblet: A Pioneering Collaboration in Modernist Photography

Man Ray began experimenting with photography in 1915, and by the time he arrived in Paris in 1921, he was short of cash and started photographing other artists' works to make a living. He soon transitioned to portrait photography, setting up his own studio by December 1921. Six months later, around the time this photograph was taken, he had just begun renting a studio on Campagne-Première. Man Ray, as seen in the present photograph, often reframed the image on the contact sheet, retouched it, and then enlarged it during printing, achieving a slightly out-of-focus effect and a softness to his images. His skill as a photographer, evident in this beguiling profile, made him the most sought-after fashion and portrait photographer in Paris, with over half of his artistic output eventually being in this field.

Man Rays' manipulated photographs are widely considered the origins of Surrealist photography. It had been Marcel Duchamp, whom in 1917 had exhibited his 'readymade' Urinal, and had introduced Man Ray to the Dada movement and Surrealism. Wanting to utilise photography to subvert and question reality in 1920 Duchamp posed for Man Ray dressed as a woman under the pseudonym 'Rose Selavy'. In Paris, the designer Paul Poiret commissioned Man Ray to take photographs of wealthy women such as Peggy Guggenheim and Nancy Cunard. Through Poiret he was introduced to the major fashion houses and magazines, working for Coco Chanel, Elsa Schiaparelli, Vogue, and Harper's Bazaar. It was Aïcha Goblet's contemporary and friend, Alice Prin, also known as Kiki de Montparnasse, who became Man Ray's lover and whom is the muse for arguably his most famous fashion photograph, published in Vogue in 1926 and entitled *Noir et Blanche*.



Man Ray (1890-1976), *Noir et Blanche*, 1926, Gelatin silver print
 Man Ray (1890-1976), *Rose Sélavy (Marcel Duchamp)*, 1921, Gelatin silver print

There is no evidence to suggest that Man Ray and Goblet ever had a romantic relationship. Goblet was well-known for her strong-willed nature, elegance, and decorum (she consistently denied being Pascin's lover, despite her exclusive role as his model when she arrived in Paris). However, it is intriguing to compare this intimate early photograph of Goblet by Man Ray with others taken by him of his lover Adrienne Fidelin, another Parisian woman of colour, in the following decade. Fidelin's life, her role as both Man Ray's and Picasso's muse, and the visibility (or lack thereof) of racial difference in modernist art of the time has been the subject of a recent article by Wendy Grossman (2020) and has much bearing on Goblet's story.



Man Ray (1890-1976), *Adrienne Fidelin with washboard*, 1937, Gelatin silver print, Collection Musée Picasso.
 Man Ray (1890-1976), *Adrienne Fidelin*, 1937. Contact prints from *Mode au Congo* series.

Grossman, speaking of Goblet's contemporary, states, "More than a muse, Fidelin was one of many individuals and entities who – in a newfound confluence of African diasporic cultures in the interwar period – changed the face of modernism...her identity as a muse providing a springboard for investigation into critical issues of race, gender, and difference in the construction of modernism."

Despite the exotic representation of Goblet by the Parisian avant-garde, she was in fact born in France to a French mother, with her Afro-Caribbean heritage coming from her father. Although Fidelin was Afro-Caribbean by birth, coming from the French colony of Guadeloupe, both women faced racial discrimination and were often depicted as African natives. Paradoxically, while avant-garde artists like Man Ray worked to challenge racial boundaries by featuring models such as Goblet and frequenting venues like the Bal Blomet, which celebrated African diaspora culture, they simultaneously reinforced racial stereotypes, often unintentionally. Despite their efforts to champion such figures, these modernist artists contributed to the romanticism and exoticism with which these individuals were perceived. For instance, Man Ray's *Mode au Congo* series shows Fidelin wearing Congolese headdresses borrowed from an exhibition at Galerie Charles Ratton in 1937 and featured in *Harper's Bazaar* with the title "The Bushongo of Africa sends his hats to Paris." It is against this backdrop and in contrast to other depictions of Aïcha Goblet and women of colour by artists of the period, the simplicity and uniqueness of the present photograph stand out.



"The Bushongo of Africa sends his hats to Paris," *Harper's Bazaar*, September 15, 1937

PARIS montparnasse

15 Août 1929

Cinq francs



LA PRINCESSE AÏCHA

"If Aïcha is often naked, she rarely undoes her head kerchief—now cabbage-green, now the color of silver—which suits her so well. Aïcha is too much a girl from Roubaix not to be perfectly civilized. She sits, she dances, she is pleasant. Long before Josephine Baker launched the fashion of banana belts, Aïcha wore, at wild parties in Montparnasse, her diminutive raffia skirt."

André Salmon, 1929.





Previous page: Henri Matisse (1869-1954), *Aïcha et Lorette*, 1917, detail, Oil on canvas, private collection

This page: *Aïcha and her son*, date and photographer unknown

Following page: Henri Hayden (1883-1970), *Aïcha Goblet*, 1913, Oil on canvas, private collection

Kayden
1913





Sources:

Blake, J. (1999). *Le Tumulte noir: Modernist Art and Popular Entertainment in Jazz-Age Paris, 1900–1930*

Fabre, M. (2007). “Rediscovering Aïcha, Lucy, and D’al-Aï: Colored French Stage Artists,” in “Josephine Baker: A Century in the Spotlight,” ed. Kaiama Glover, special issue, *The Scholar and Feminist Online* 6, no. 1–2 (2007–8), published by The Barnard Center for Research on Women.

Grossman, Wendy. A. (2020). “Unmasking Adrienne Fidelin: Picasso, Man Ray, and the (In)Visibility of Racial Difference” in *Modernism and Modernity Magazine*.

Murrell, D. (2018). *Posing Modernity: The Black Model from Manet and Matisse to Today*. Yale University Press.

CHARLES EDE

info@charlesede.com

www.charlesede.com

@charles_ed