DATA VISUALIZATION & MUSEUM COLLECTIONS:

Assessing a museum collection's scope and global perspective

RESEARCH QUESTION

The Carnegie Museum of Art (CMOA) is a contemporary art museum in Pittsburgh. Their mission statement speaks to bringing a global perspective, stating that the museum "collects, preserves, and presents artworks **from around the world** to inspire, sustain, and provoke discussion, and to engage and **reflect multiple audiences**." A statement from their director echoes similar sentiments, stating that CMOA endeavors to "frequently explore the role of art and artists in confronting key social issues of our time, **combining and juxtaposing local and global perspectives.**"

This project seeks to analyze the success of this effort of bringing a global perspectives by analyzing CMOA's collection data, which includes:
- *Information about the artwork* (including title, creation date, and date acquired)
- *Information about the artist* (including name, nationality, and birthplace)

TOOLS

Data cleaning: OpenRefine
Data visualizations: Tableau, TimelineJS
Website creation: Mobirise
Website hosting: GitHub Pages

All tools were:
- Free to use
- Relatively easy to learn

FINDINGS

ARTISTS
The data shows that the collection is largely American- and Euro-centric:

    54.22% are American artists
+ **31.02**% are European artists
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    85.24% are Western artists

ITEMS ON VIEW
96.99% of artworks on view are from Western artists, with 93 of the 133 pieces from American artists, 10 from German artists, and 9 from British artists

Despite extensive holdings in Japanese art, **only 1** of these pieces is on view

Of the 12 exhibitions held since 2016, 9 of them featured exclusively American artists
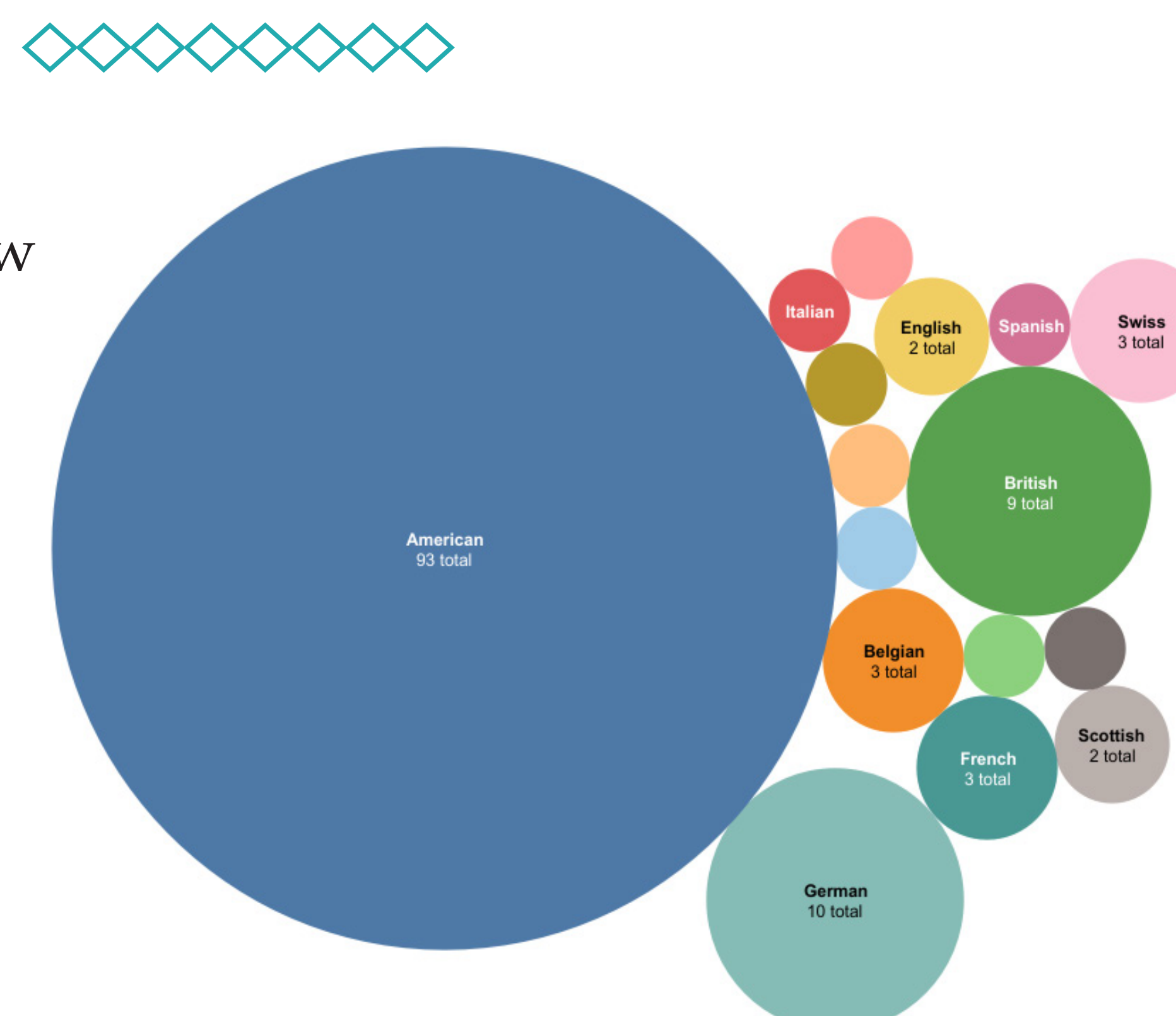
Graph depicting artworks on view at the museum by artist nationality

ACQUISITIONS
- Generally across all nationalities, 2/3 of artworks are gifted and 1/3 are purchased
- A few notable exceptions: German, South African, and Turkish art are almost exclusively purchased, not gifted
- While 30.9% of American art was purchased, that equals 816 works— far more works, purchased or otherwise, than any other country

TAKEAWAYS

DATA LIMITATIONS
Nationality does not equal diversity.
The most common nationality within the collection— American—represents people of all different races, gender identities, abilities, and sexual orientations, which all shape their experience of the world. The fact that they are all the same nationality does not mean they all share the same lived experience. Nationality can only go so far in reflecting diversity of perspective.

People may identify with multiple nationalities.
Below is a map depicting the birthplace of artists classified as American. While many of the artists were born in the United States, quite a few were born elsewhere—suggesting that perhaps these artists could identify with the nationality of their birthplace as well as with their American nationality. The data, which attributes only one nationality to each artist, is unable to capture this complexity.
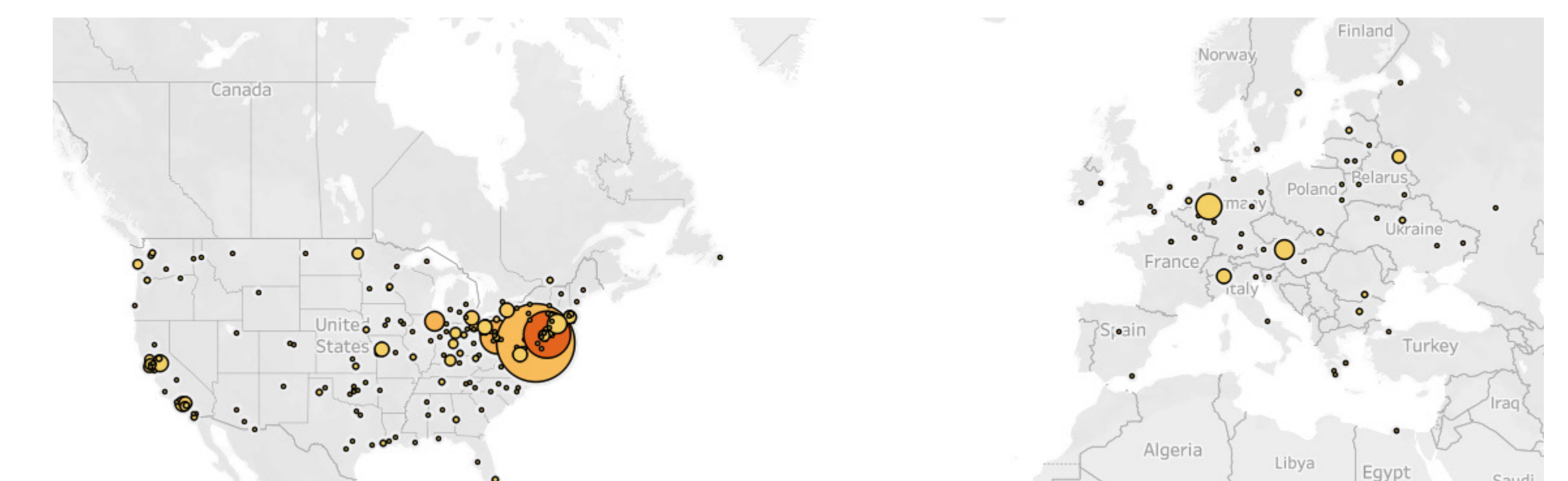
DATA TRANSPARENCY
It is critical to be transparent about the limitations of the data as opposed to presenting data visualizations as unequivocal fact. In addition to calling attention to the limitations of nationality as the only indicator of a diverse or global perspective, this project also lists all decisions made while standardizing the data, so that other researchers can truly evaluate the work.

See the project in full at
savannahlake.github.io/dh201

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