

CULTURAL TRENDS LAB

EN RU

ART AFTER COVID-19? EXAMINING THE GROWTH OF ART BIENNALES FROM 1895 TO TODAY

April 2, 2020

The current **COVID-19** pandemic is affecting the world economically, socially, and cultural. Numerous cultural events are being cancelled. **Global culture is entering a new period**, and we don't know yet what it will be. But regardless of what may happen, having **quantitative knowledge of long term cultural trends** will help us better understand the future when it arrives.

In the last few decades, contemporary culture has expanded very significantly, both in terms of its geographic diffusion and numbers of institutions and events. We investigate these changes in **Elsewhere** project. This report uses only one small part of the larger data we collected for this project. It focuses on one cultural area where both growth and diffusion

LATEST POSTS

Apr 2, 2020

ART AFTER COVID-19?
EXAMINING THE
GROWTH OF ART
BIENNALES FROM
1895 TO TODAY

Oct 29, 2019

HOW TO SEE THE
WORLD (OF
CULTURE)

Oct 4, 2019

THINKING WITH |
AFTER | AGAINST
DATA

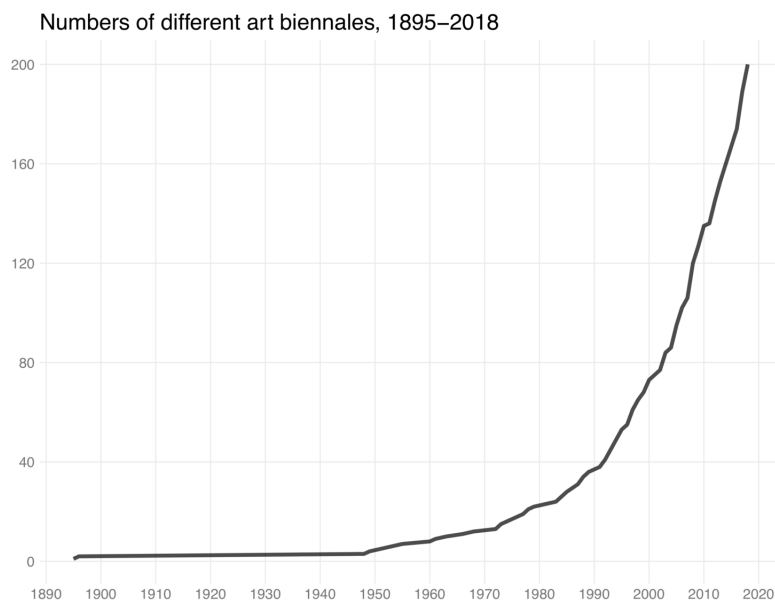
Apr 10, 2019

REPRESENTING THE
CITY AND THE
EVERYDAY WITH
MEDIA AND DATA

are particularly striking - international **art biennales**. To the best of our knowledge, this is **the first quantitative analysis of art biennales history**.

We created **a dataset of all biennales** that had editions in 2017 or 2018. (Many new arts biennales that started in the last decades had only a few editions and did not continue. We decided to include only biennales that keep going, so the latest edition in 2017 or 2018 was our criteria for inclusion.)

The first international art biennale took place in **1895** in Venice. There are **36** biennales by 1990, **68** biennales by 2010, and **200** by 2019. The plot above shows this growth. To create the graph below, we added the number of all unique biennales in each year that were active in 2017-2018.



We expected that the graph would reflect some political and economic events - such as the end of Cold War and beginning of globalization around 1991 or **global financial crisis of 2008-2009**. Instead, the graph shows very **gradual acceleration** of growth - leading to **exponential growth**.

There are no sudden leaps forward or big temporary slow downs. (However, later we will plot the data differently and see that things are a bit more complicated.)

Apr 10, 2019

DATA SCIENCE AND THE ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

Feb 11, 2019

WHY TYUMEN, DR. MANOVICH?

Jan 27, 2019

OUR LAB SPACE IS READY

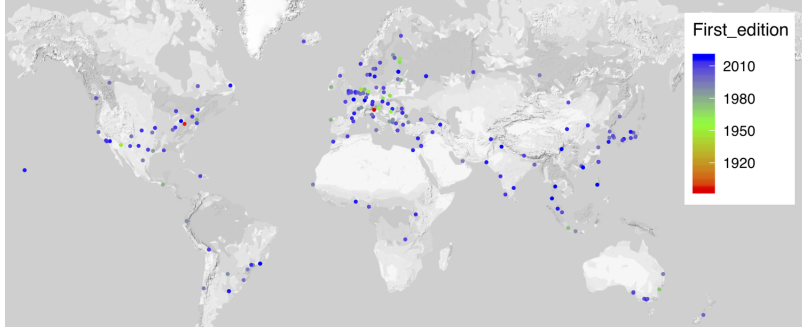
Dec 23, 2018

AI AESTHETICS - NEW BOOK BY LEV MANOVICH

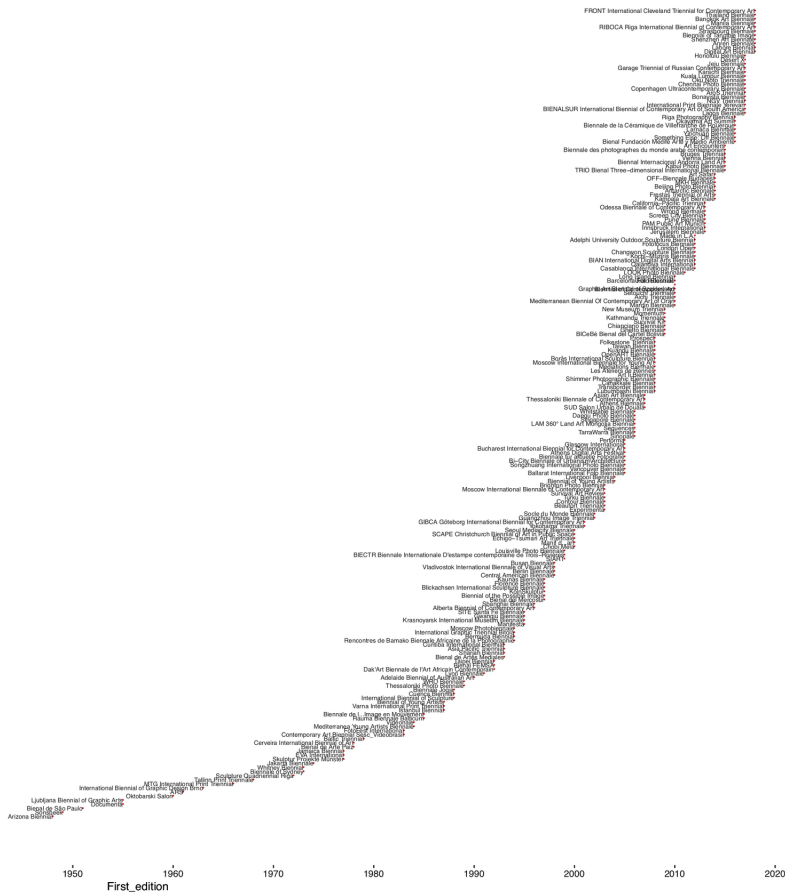
Nov 30, 2018

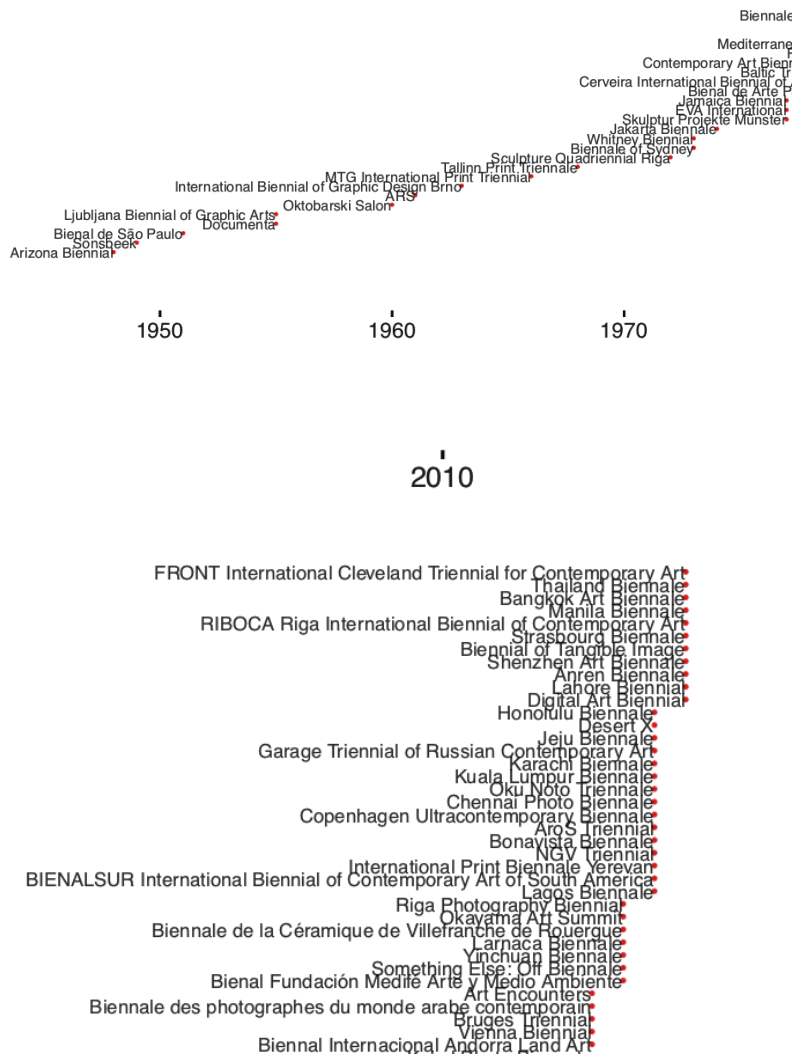
INTERVIEW WITH LEV MANOVICH BY DARIA REMIZOVA

The map below shows all **200 biennale locations** in our dataset, with color indicating the first edition year of each biennales. As we can see, most biennales active today emerged recently (last 10-15 years).



in the next graph, we added **names of all biennales** next to the points indicating their **first editions** (on x-axis). Below it are two **closeup** of this graph, showing new biennales emerging in first part of the 20th and early 21st centuries.



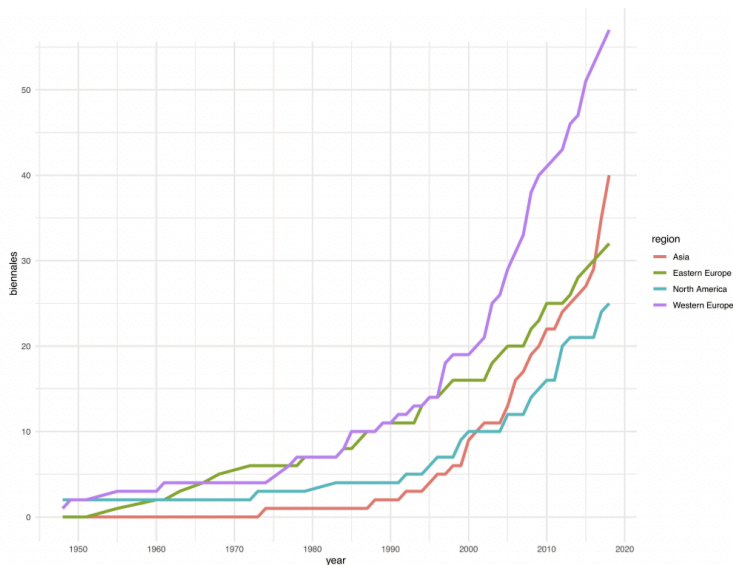


Next, we will look in more details at temporal trends in a few **geographic regions**. In the 1960s and 1970s **Eastern Europe** has more biennales than **Western Europe**. But after 1996, **the two grow at different speeds**. More new biennales emerge in Western Europe, and less in Eastern Europe, and this gap keeps getting bigger.

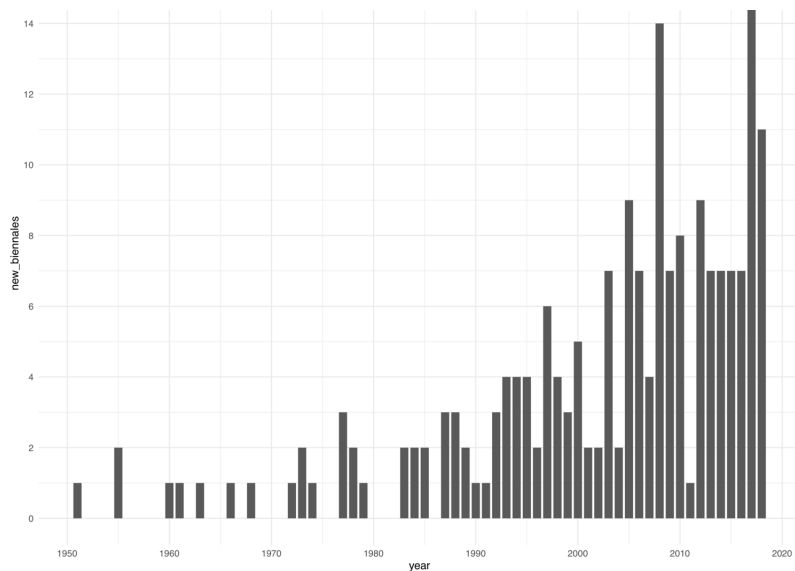
In Asia, growth at first is very slow but eventually it accelerates. In **2002 Asia overtakes North America**. In **2017** Asia leaps over Eastern Europe.

The grows rate of new biennales **gradually accelerates in all regions**. However, the result of this growth are different. By 2018 -

“Western Europe - 57
 biennales.
 Asia - 40
 Eastern Europe - 32
 Latin America - 15
 Africa - 7
 Caribbean - 3.”



Finally, what about **possible effects of 2007-2008 global financial crisis**? Did the growth in the numbers of new biennales slowed down? More generally, is there a direct **connection between the economic patterns and the growth of art biennales**? To approach this question, we plot the data in different way. While previous graphs were showing cumulative numbers of all biennales for every year, in the next graph we only show **the numbers of new biennales every year**.



There are three periods of particularly fast acceleration of growth: 1997-2000, 2006-2009, and 2017-2018. **Between 2009 and 2017, the growth rate does not change - 7 new biennales are added every year.**

Only one year is an exception. This year is 2011 - three years after the crisis started. Only one new biennale still active today was added in 2011.

What will be the effect of the **current global pandemic** on the future of large-scale cultural events? Right now (early April 2020) we can't predict it. However, it is encouraging to learn that **the impact of the last big financial crisis** in at least one area - art biennales - was limited. While it did **slow down the growth** for a number of years, it did not stop. **New biennales were still launched every year.**

(Of course, other factors can be also responsible for these trends besides level of economy. We should also keep in mind that now we have a pandemic, and not only the economic downturn.)

The development of contemporary art and culture in general **cannot be measured by such quantitative data only.** For example, the number of new art biennales launched every year, although indicative of certain growth and

expansion in the field, does not say anything about the nature, topicality, or importance of the art exhibited in these biennales. However, the comparison of biennale activity among geographical regions illuminates **the impact of the economic and political inequality on the art world**. But most importantly, our data captures the development of the biennale as a very specific model for organizing art production and consumption. This model so far used to rely on transnational networking and ever increasing global mobility of artists and curators. In case the pandemic will have a long-lasting impact on how we travel, the biennale model will have to reinvent itself or otherwise we will see the rise of alternative models in the art world.

April 12, 2020.

Research and datasets: Alise Tifentalle

Data analysis, visualization and text: Lev Manovich and Alise Tifentalle

In project publication

Tags big data analyst, data science, art biennales, graph, visualization, data research

Share

0 Likes

HOW TO SEE THE WORLD (OF CULTURE)

October 29, 2019