Art on Display:

representation of artists in textbooks and museums

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Project Goal and Importance

Research Question

What is the relationship between an artist's identity and how often they are exhibited at select museums and textbooks?

Hypothesis

White + Male

Importance of Research

Examining these relationships is important because it can reveal potential inequalities in whose work receives recognition and attention within art history.

Our Data

Source: arthistory package (TidyTuesday, Jan 2023), from Holland Stam's thesis Quantifying Art Historical Narratives

Coverage: Janson's History of Art and Gardner's Art Through the Ages, 1926 to 2020

Each row: one artist in one textbook edition

Key variables:

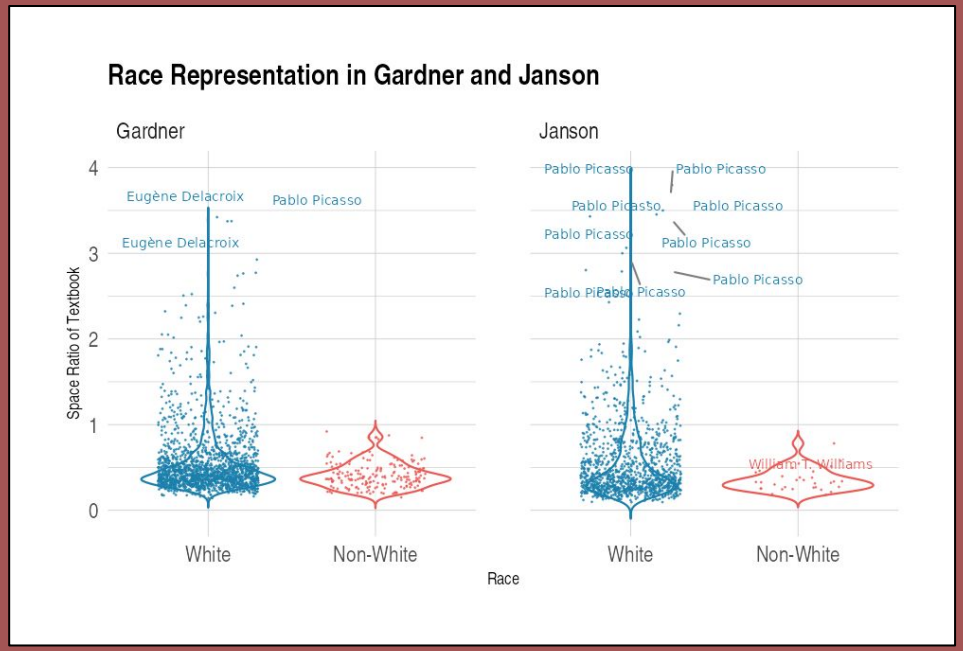
- Gender and race/ethnicity
- space_ratio_per_page_total: the artist's text and figures as a share of one page (1 = a full page)
- MoMA and Whitney exhibition counts

Cleanup:

Ethnicity was only recorded for white artists, so we reclassified white artists of Hispanic/Latino origin as their own group for the non-white breakdowns

Grouped exhibition history into MoMA / Whitney / Both / Neither

Textbook Representation by Race



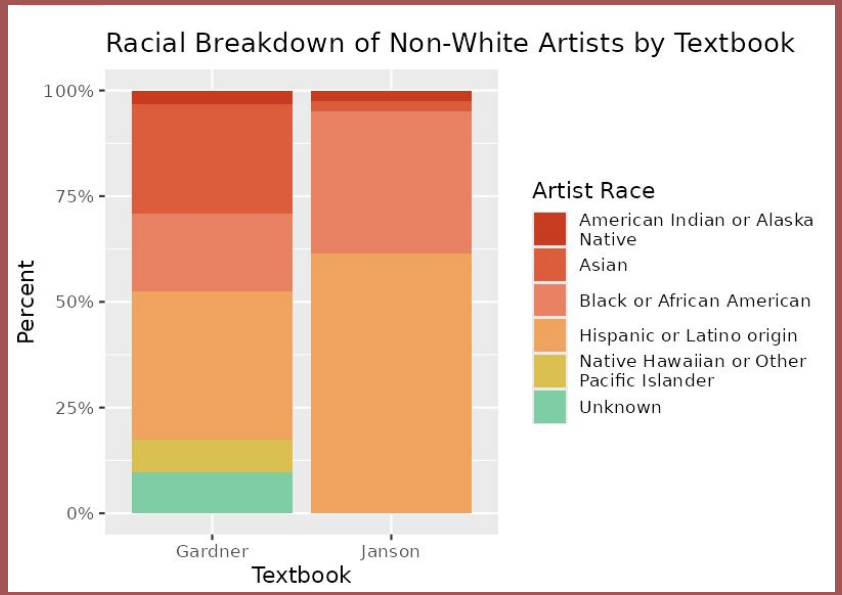
This graph examines the differences in how much space an artist's work takes up relative to the entire textbook page based on race.

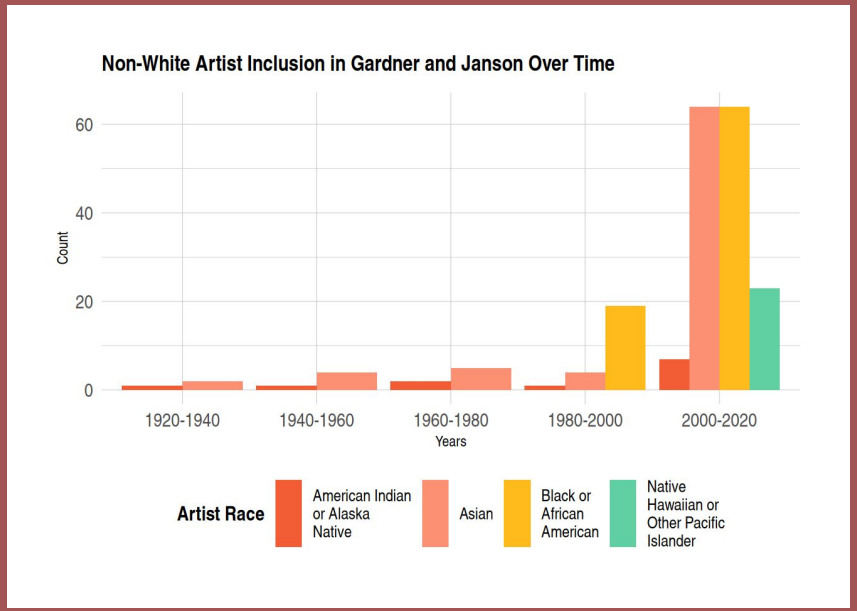
- Both Gardner and Janson seem to show relatively similar results.
- Interestingly, the violin plot indicates that most artists take up a similar proportion of a textbook page.
- The main difference between the violin plots when comparing the space ratio of white vs non-white artists were that many of the extreme outliers like Picasso and Delacroix tend to be white.

Non-White Inclusion in Textbooks

Graphs break down the inclusion of non-white artists in Textbooks

- Artists of Hispanic or Latino origin have the most and American Indian or Alaska Native artists have the least
- Notable differences in representation between the textbooks
- 1920-1980 virtually no difference in representation; however, only two groups were represented which changed post 1980

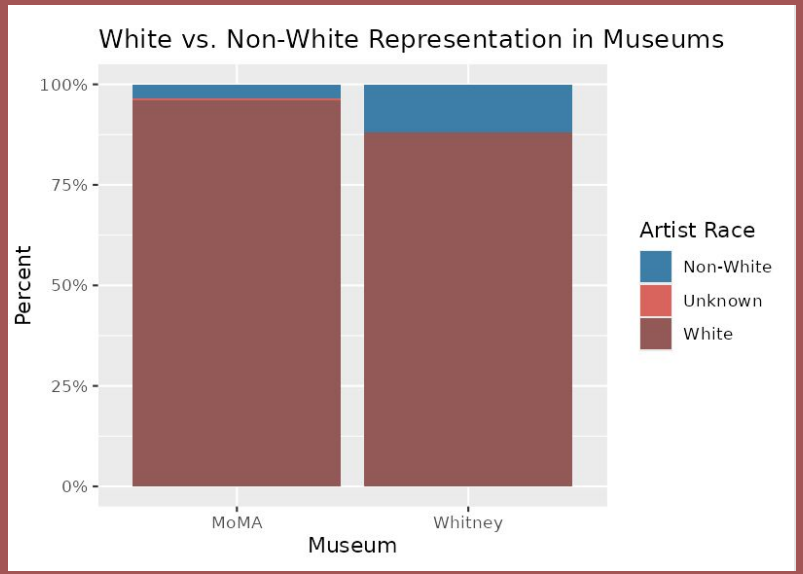


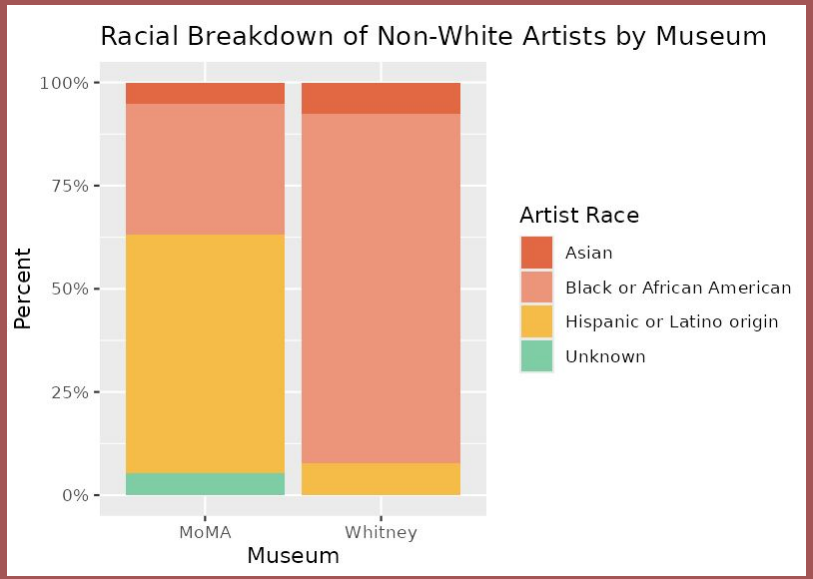


Race Inclusion in Museums

Graphs break down inclusion in museums by race

- Significantly more white representation than non-white representation in museums
- MoMA has a little bit more of a diverse split whereas the Whitney does not
- Only three races are represented, a notable difference from the textbooks

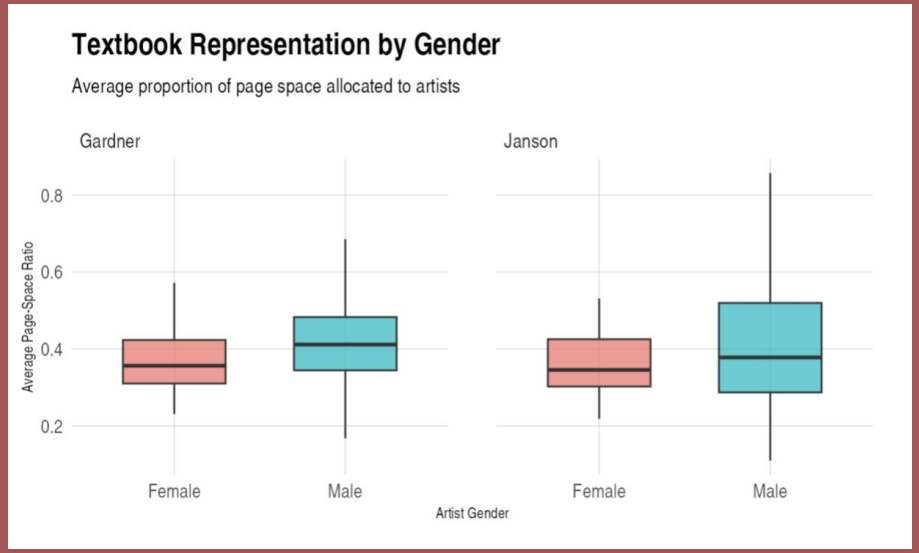




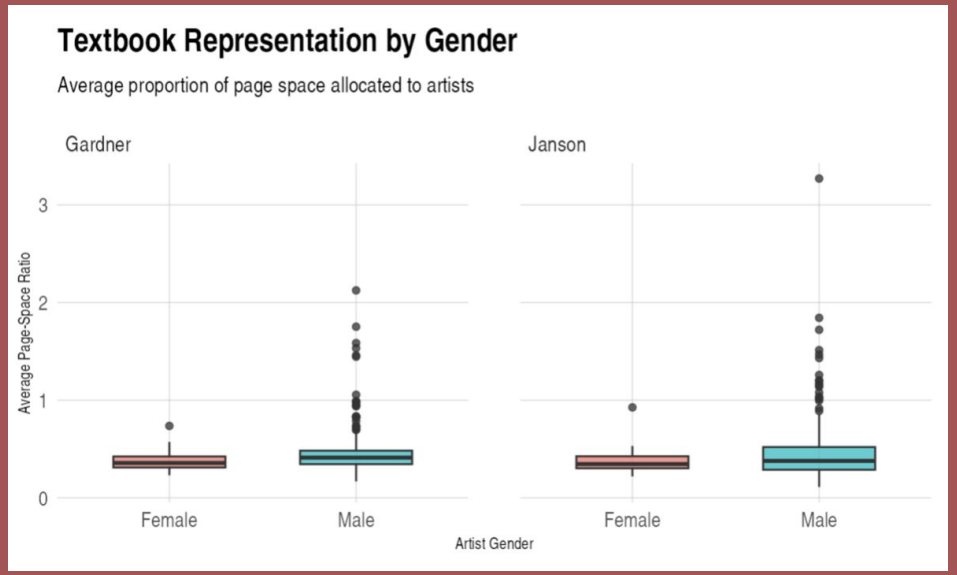
Textbook Representation Across Genders

Graphs examines the amount of space allocated by gender among artists already represented in the textbooks.

- The space_ratio_per_page_total variable measures the total area occupied by an artist's text and figures divided by the area of ONE textbook page.
- Value of 1 is equivalent to one full page.



*Outliers excluded.



*Outliers included

What we found

- Page space is similar across gender and race
- A few very large entries (Picasso, Monet, Delacroix) go to white men
- Non-white artists were rare until the 1980s and grew after 2000
- White artists are the large majority of those exhibited at MoMA and the Whitney
- These results support our hypothesis that male and white artists are over-represented

Limitations

- The biggest barrier to entry is who gets into the textbooks in the first place, and our data only includes artists who did, so we can't see who was left out
- Two American textbooks and two New York museums

Future steps

- Compare against who was actually working at the time
- Add more textbooks and museums
- Track individual artists across editions