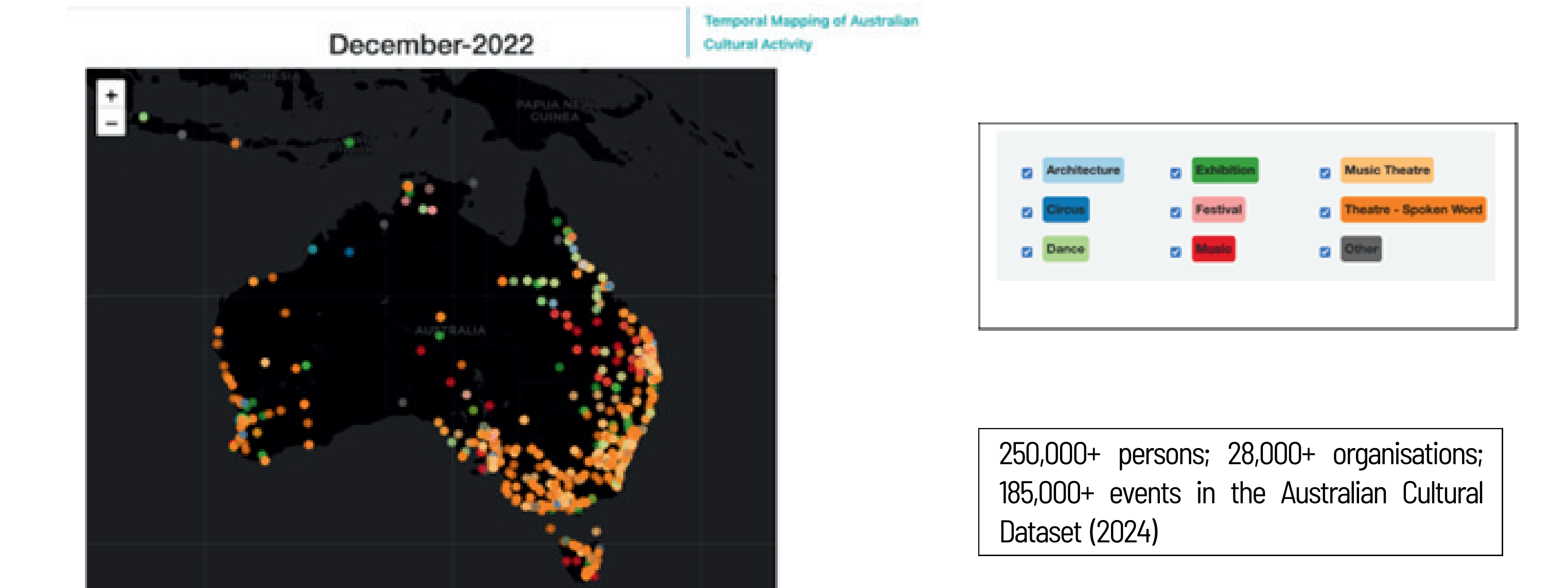


What is Cultural Data?

We work with data from theatre, circus, fine arts, design, literature, and music – cultural productions emerging from the deliberate pursuit of artistic practice. For us, cultural data comprises the machine-readable traces left by and generated to describe inherently experiential, ephemeral, and richly layered works of art and performance as well as the people, organisations, and places that surround them.



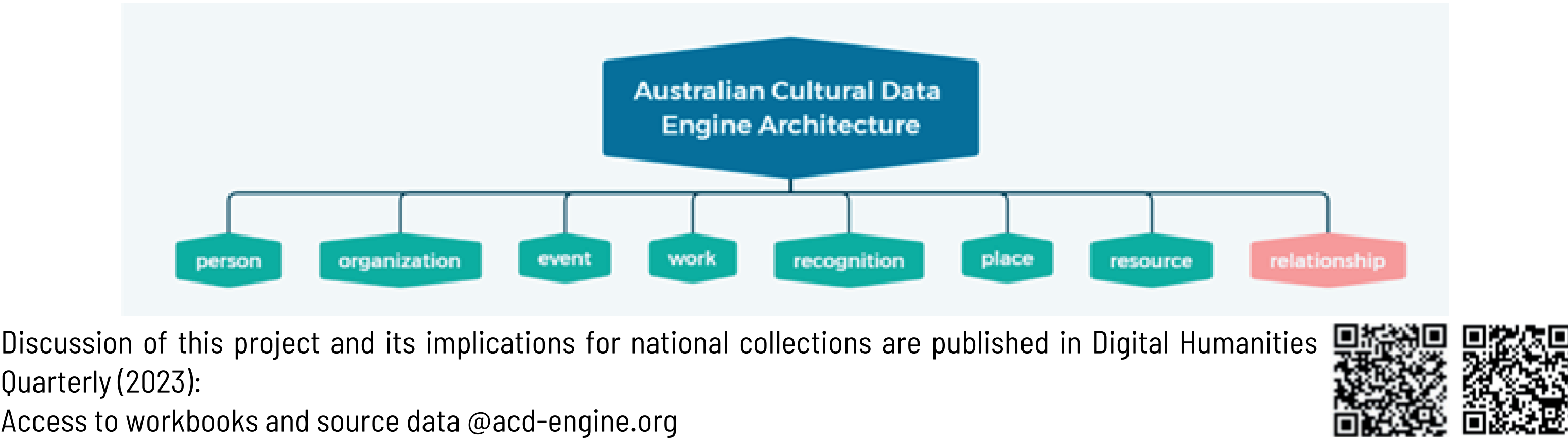
Genealogies of the Cultural Database

Over 20 years of digital humanities research, the resources, infrastructure and projects for the development of Australian cultural data has been fragmented, and contingent upon the commitment, focus, and values of relatively narrow disciplinary boundaries.¹ Primary funding through the Australian Research Council on project grants has however led to the following important cultural databases:

- AusStage (performing arts), <https://www.ausstage.edu.au/>;
- DAAO (visual arts and design), <https://www.daa0.org.au/>;
- DAQA (architecture), <https://qldarch.net/>;
- AWR (women's history), <https://www.womenaustralia.info/>; and
- the Living Archive (circus), <https://researchdata.edu.au/circus-oz-living-archive-collection/939530>

Putting Cultural Data to Work

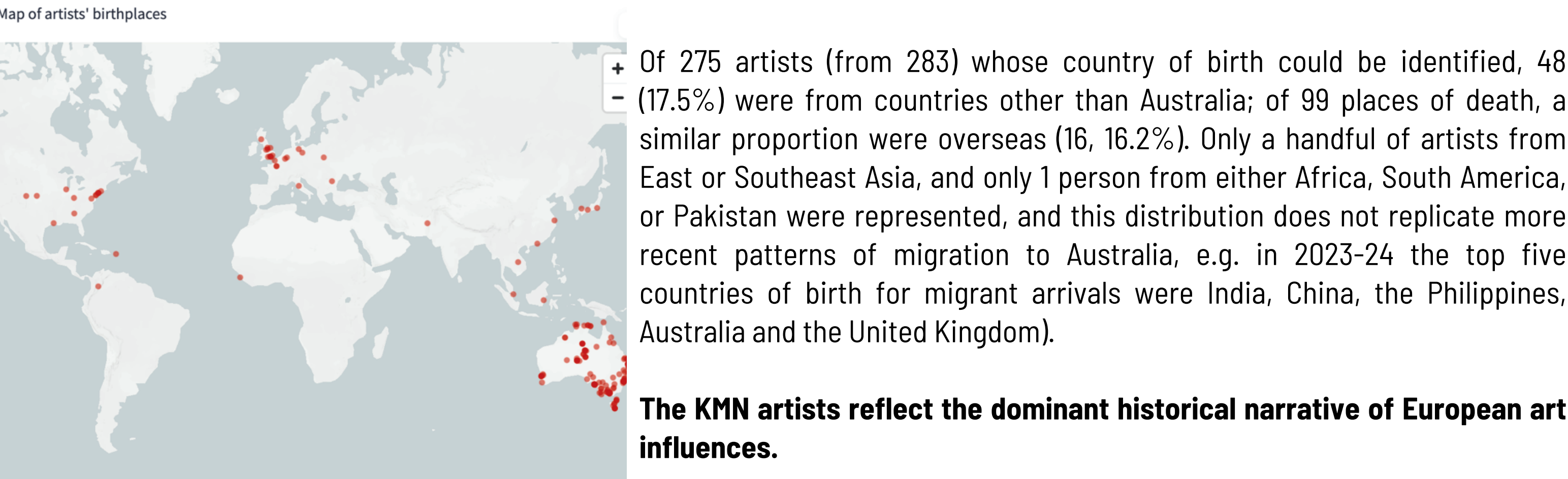
The Australian Cultural Data Engine (2021-2024)² was an Australian Research Council infrastructure project that identified crosswalk methods to make data from these discrete databases interoperable and more robust, in order to answer new questions about cultural data and creative practices. We identified 7 overlapping entities to construct a unique information architecture of relevance to a wide range of cultural collections.



Given the affordances of interoperability – generated in the friction that exists between data custodians and data engineers – we identified rich deposits of historical insight about art, artists and cultural change in the Australian Cultural Data Engine and its workbooks.

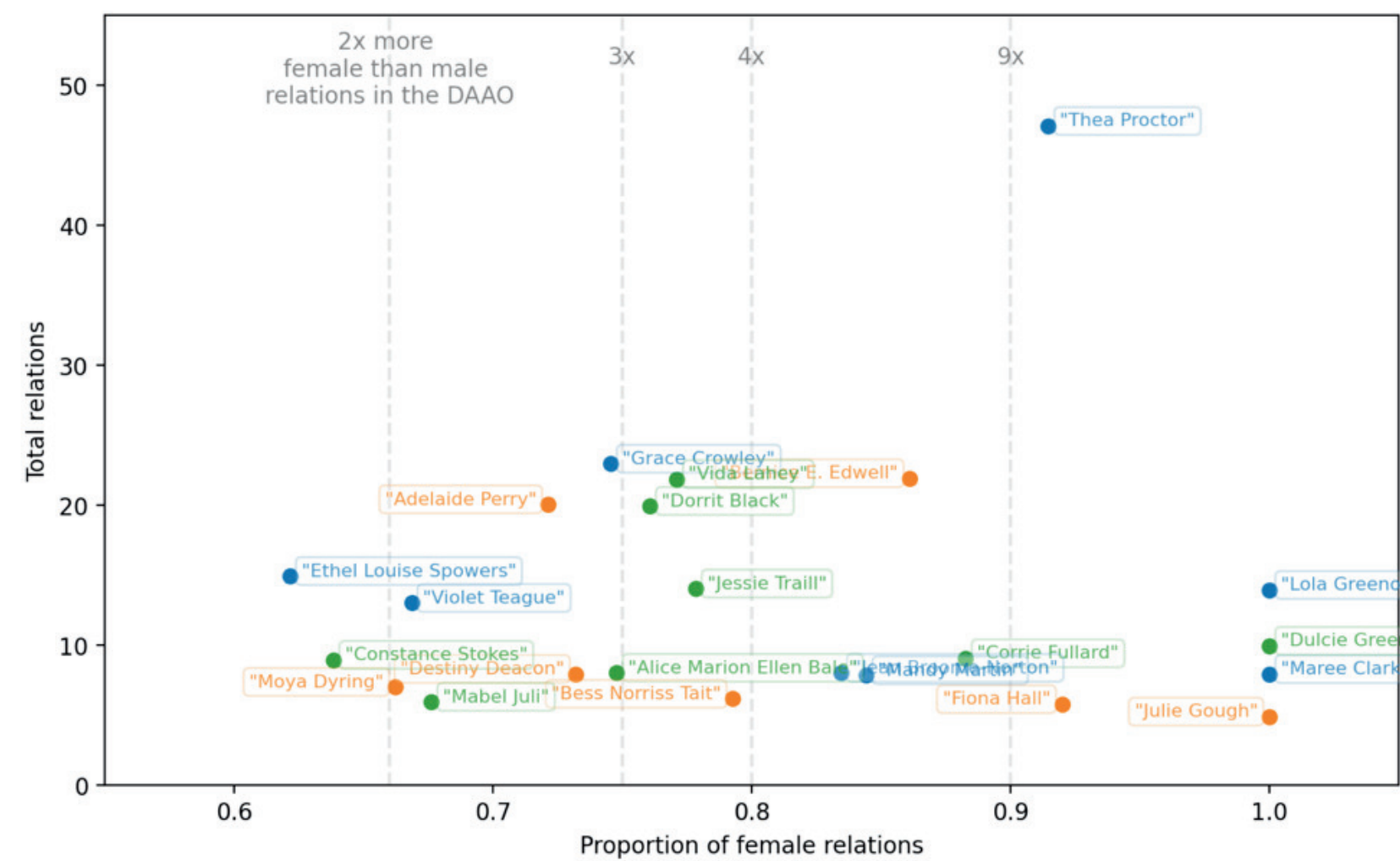
1. Artists as diasporic subjects (where did they come from?)

Know My Name's commitment to ‘celebrate the diversity [...] of Australian women artists’ is potentially fulfilled by artists from 19 countries of birth – Australia, China, Colombia, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Laos, Netherlands, New Zealand, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Sierra Leone, Singapore, UK, and USA.



A powerful exception of diversity appears in the inclusion of 50 Indigenous artists (18%) who have transformed contemporary Australian art history in the past 3 to 4 decades. These individuals can be identified on the map with datapoints located in the north and centre of the Australian landmass.

2. Artist networks (who did they know?)



KMN artists with 2+female relations in the Australian Cultural Dataset Each point represents an individual artist, with the vertical axis counting total relations compared to the percentage of female relations on the horizontal axis.

The cluster of women in the middle with approximately 20 relationships each are all notable female modernist artists, whose well-established career trajectories affords a mixture of male and female connections. A notable outlier emerges in the instance of the prominent modernist painter, printmaker, designer and teacher Thea Proctor (1879-1966), often regarded as a ‘tastemaker’.

While Proctor’s connections ostensibly exceed those of her fellow KMN exhibitionists, our visualisation shows that **the breadth of this mid-century woman’s network, and prominent success, was dominantly inclined towards males than other artists.** In comparison, at the right of the plot, **the 3 contemporary Aboriginal artists Lola Greeno, Dulcie Greeno, and Maree Clarke participate in relationships with more than 10 artists, with a majority of those being women.**

References: 1. Jussi Parikka and Erkki Huhtamo. (2011). *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*, University of California Press. 2. Australian Research Council Linkage Infrastructure, Engineering and Facilities Program Grant LE210100021. 3. Indrek Ibrus, Maximilian Schich, and Marek Tamm. (2021). ‘Cultural Science Meets Cultural Data Analytics’, *Cultural Science Journal* 13, 1 (2021): 6. 4. Roopika Risam,. (2018). *New Digital Worlds: Postcolonial Digital Humanities in Theory, Praxis and Pedagogy*, Northwestern University Press.

Intimate Analytics: a Methodology

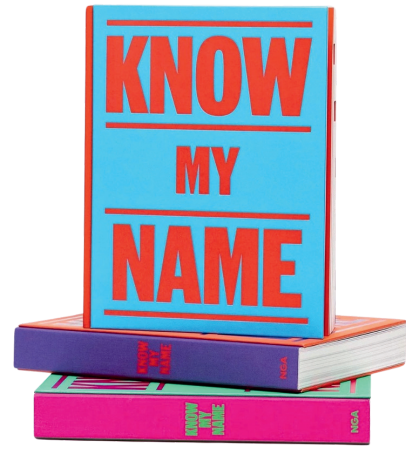
There is a deliberate tension in our definition of cultural data and digital collections insofar as we deliberately embrace the gulf between the experience of cultural production and its recorded (or often unrecorded) alternative. To analyse the cultural data points that accumulate in digital collections is to disorientate the relationships to data not as merely quantitative entities but as qualitative values with rich potential for producing alternative and novel narratives about art and its discursive formation over time. Guided by the idea that cultural phenomena are complex, not necessarily following simple quantitative laws with simple meaningful averages, we are interested in the mysterious gap between cultural ephemera in situ and the datafied traces they leave.³

We call this methodology *intimate analytics* in our forthcoming Routledge book on this topic and it is comprised of 6 principles:

- Expose the genealogies of data infrastructures
- Query the objectivity of data entry methods and entity orientations
- Embrace idiosyncrasy and incompleteness as corollaries of culture
- Draw computational outputs and local knowledge together
- Bridge the macro, the micro, and the atypical
- Foreground risk and encourage debate.

Intimate analytics can enhance, trouble, and unsettle conventional approaches to cultural data, and put it into dialogue with the structures, biases and conventions of knowing the past.

KNOW MY NAME: A Case Study



One key case study of Intimate Analytics we applied to an exhibition, KNOW MY NAME, curated by the National Gallery of Australia (2021-2025), which aimed to give greater recognition to women artists within Australian art history.

To investigate the curatorial policy beyond the artworks hung on the walls, we constructed a discrete dataset of the 283 participants and undertook to examine the profile of the artists, their career trajectories and networks, as well as their global influence. In what follows, we examine 4 themes in which the intimate analytics of cultural data raise important new questions about what constitutes an artist in Australia, and how they become known and potentially most successful.

The exhibition never set out to answer such questions, but the dataset exposes some of the powerful fractures that challenge art historical narratives once the contradictions and idiosyncrasies of data curation can be examined.

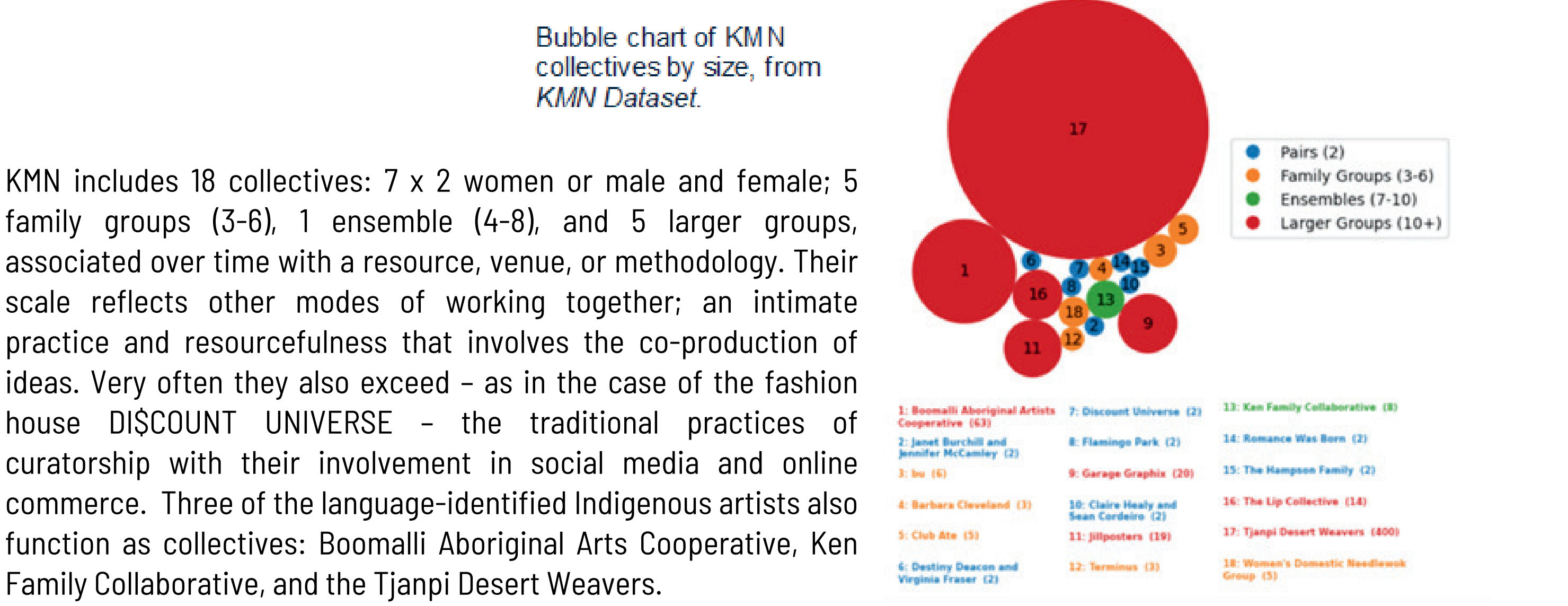
Conclusion

- In Australia, the temporal history of the cultural database has at minimum 3 layers:
- the deep cultural time and identities of its Indigenous peoples
 - the white, colonial settler narratives of European ancestry; and
 - the waves of global migration that now constitute the majority of its population and cultural landscape.

The KMN dataset, in both its temporal and spatial dimensions, as a curated collection gave important recognition to women artists in Australia. We could show, however, that it was still skewed towards the European, nominally, white and colonial view of an artist’s subjectivity, as represented by time and place of birth. Our more intimate analytics of the database (understood as relatively novel in the curatorial practices of galleries and art historians) exposes how and in what ways a diversity of women have constituted agency as artists within networks, collectives and a global reordering of the centres and peripheries of cultural production.

3. Art as collective practice (who did they work with?)

The inclusion of fashion, design and performance within the gallery space pioneered by second wave feminism sees the presence of collaborative and resistant art practices that extend the representation of the individual as artist towards partnerships, groups and collectives.

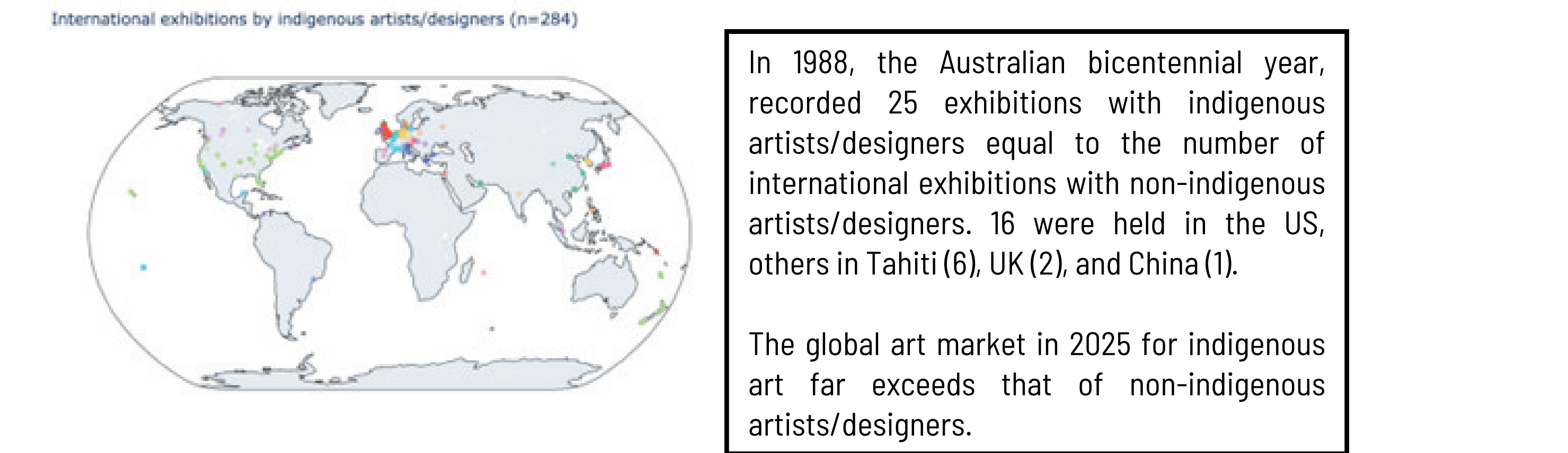


Identifying these female collectives, and their diverse datapoints in the database, exposes a global reach that exceeds the national curatorial frame.

4. Decolonising the cultural database (what shapes the art world?)

A decolonising digital humanities, as Roopika Risam writes, contributes to ‘dismantling the colonial dynamics of the digital cultural record’ and in the process, can ‘produce new ways of knowing and new theories that emerge from undoing’.⁴

Many Indigenous artists live and work in communities in more remote parts of the country – desert locations, islands, and northern coasts – that are thriving centres of Indigenous cultural production. Indigenous art is of place, and of a deep temporal belonging, and is often, although not always, a story of family and land. It is also a global art phenomenon.



In the limited frame of the Know My Name exhibition, the registering of language group names and the consequent decentring of artistic expertise serves as a corrective to past histories of Australian art. **In the digital cultural catalogue, this includes changing the names of entries, adding language group identities, as well as changing understandings of place, that are bilingual and hence also multi-layered.**