The Economic Geography of American Artists, Postbellum to World War II

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In this project, we set to better understand the determinants of artistic activity and its outcome, as well as the economic geography of the arts in the US. By doing so, we are able to shed light on the mechanisms that drive successful creative process with an emphasis on the role played by agglomeration economies. The project consists on the three research papers which will leverage similar data. We combine demographic and socioeconomic data from the historic US Census with unique, purpose-built individual-level datasets generated from encyclopedia entries, bestseller lists, and collections of critical acclaim by matching names and birth information such as year and location. In addition, we geocode street addresses and leverage occupation description to determine precise location of artists and other workers and to further refine artistic occupation. Leveraging the spatial and temporal variation we focus on understanding (i) the role of gender, ethnicity and location on the success of American artists; (ii) the location choices of American artists and how they connect to other occupations and industries; and (iii) the agglomeration economies driving artistic clustering.