

Dante Today: Adaptation Theory Through Dantean Works in Contemporary Culture

Adalyn Pickett and Dr. Elizabeth Coggeshall

Introduction: Dante Today



Image 1: Dante portrait, Attilio Roncaldier painting

The *Dante Today* website co-created by Dr. Elizabeth Coggeshall and Dr. Arielle Saber, compiles and logs modern global “sightings” or “citings” that reference or are inspired by the work of medieval Italian poet and writer Dante Alighieri, most known for his *Divine Comedy*. Contemporary adaptations of Dante manifest in many forms and genres, such as art, music, film, merchandise, and more, often reviving his visions and imagery of the afterlife.

Before the site was created in 2006, no other digital archive dedicated to Dantean adaptations existed, leaving a significant gap in Dante scholarship that underscored his contemporary influence. Dante serves as one of the most iterated literary authors and continues to be adapted into new genres and forms, speaking to the enduring resonance and relevancy of various Dantean themes across generations and continents.

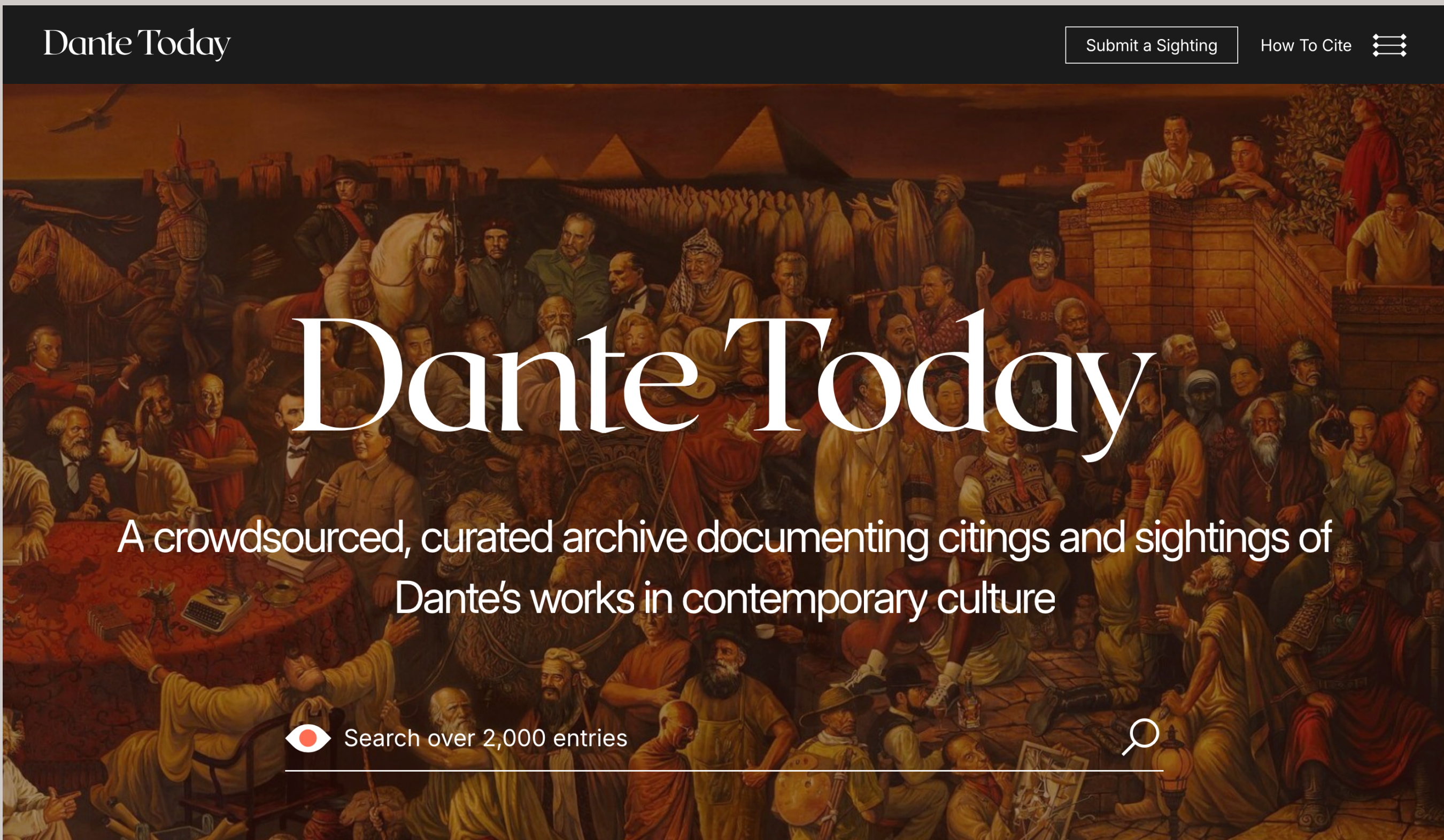


Image 2: Screen capture of Dante Today homepage.

In a novel contribution to Dante studies, *Dante Today* invites users and scholars to ask: *how do contemporary adaptations of Dante’s works, as presented by the archive, reflect the cultural resonance of Dantean themes, across different media, genres, and global contexts?*

Methods

To accommodate increasingly unique and multi-genre sightings, *Dante Today* was visually and functionally redesigned to better equip users to efficiently discover the diversity of Dantean media. The UROP research team assists by updating the newly designed site through re-creation of posts from the old site with new tags and discoverability features.

- Utilized WordPress software to input and edit posts.
- Implemented new filtering sytem with streamlined keyword tags for medium, genre, location, creation date, and more.
- Conducted a literature review for bridging concepts of adaptation theory with the contemporary reproductions of Dante.

Findings

The updated Dante Today website includes new features, such as an interactive global map of all sightings. With enhanced discoverability in mind, the site optimizes the ability to find niche Dante-inspired works, a necessity to broaden the scope of Dante and adaptation studies.

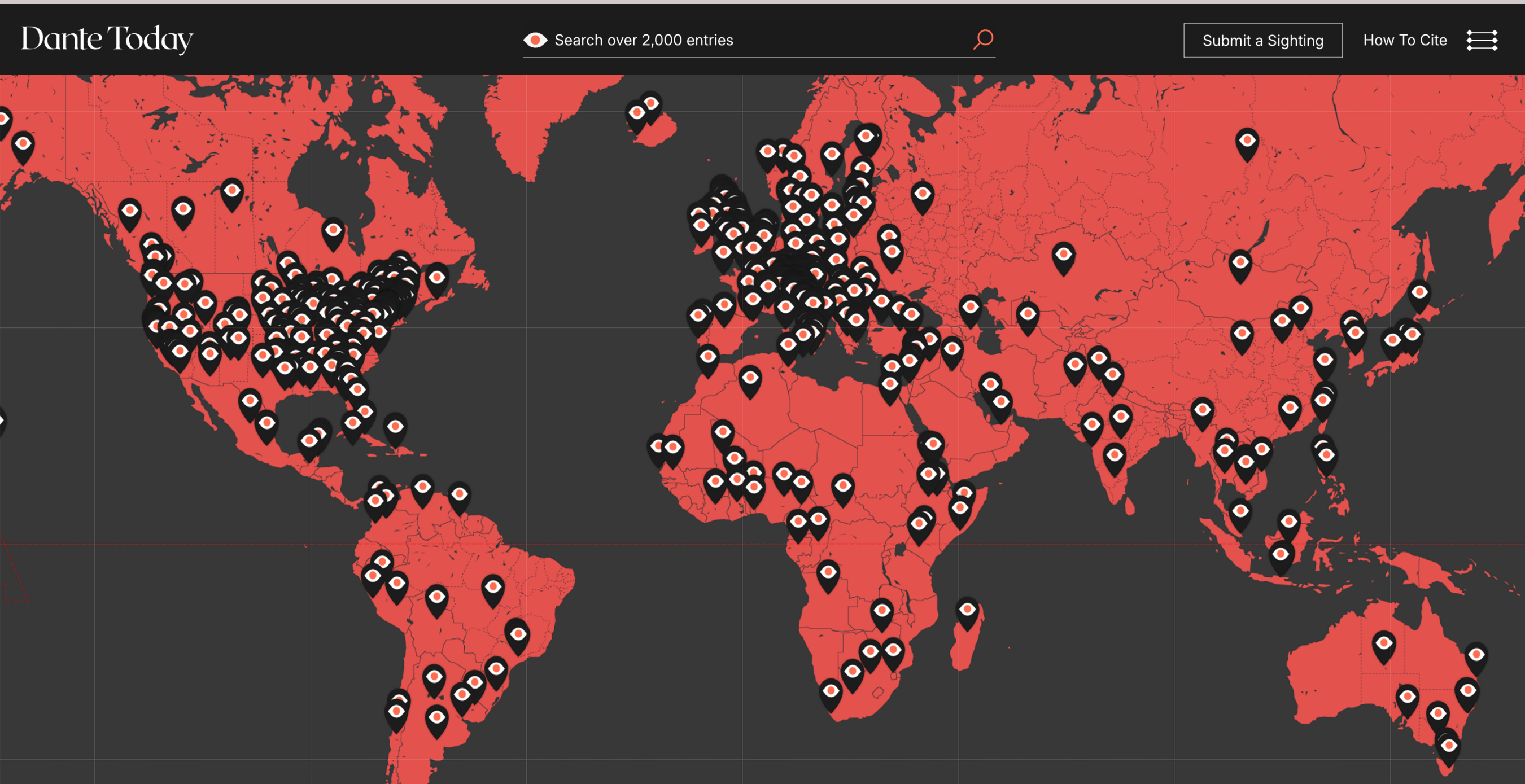


Image 3: Screen capture of Dante Today map of sightings.

Streamlined Search Queries

The newly designed *Dante Today* also includes a new filtering system. Tags and keywords were reorganized and simplified for improved discoverability of sightings. More specific terminology, such as “Manga” or “Drag,” makes finding unique sightings easier as well.

The new site creates a more user-friendly experience with distinct search queries in mind when tagging posts, using unique keywords and multi-genre tags. Sample searches in Images 4 & 5 display the new functionality.

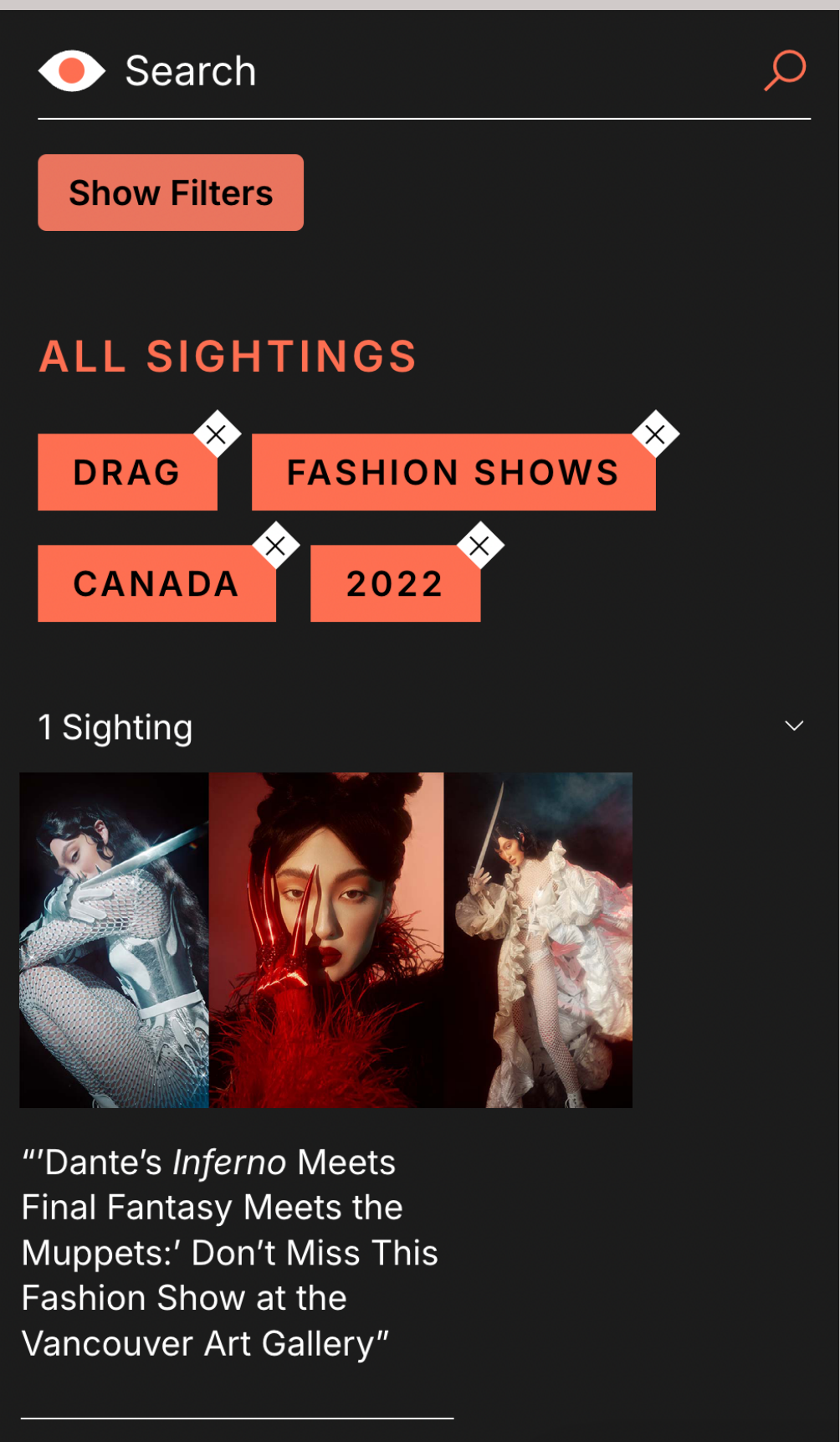


Image 5: Sample result.

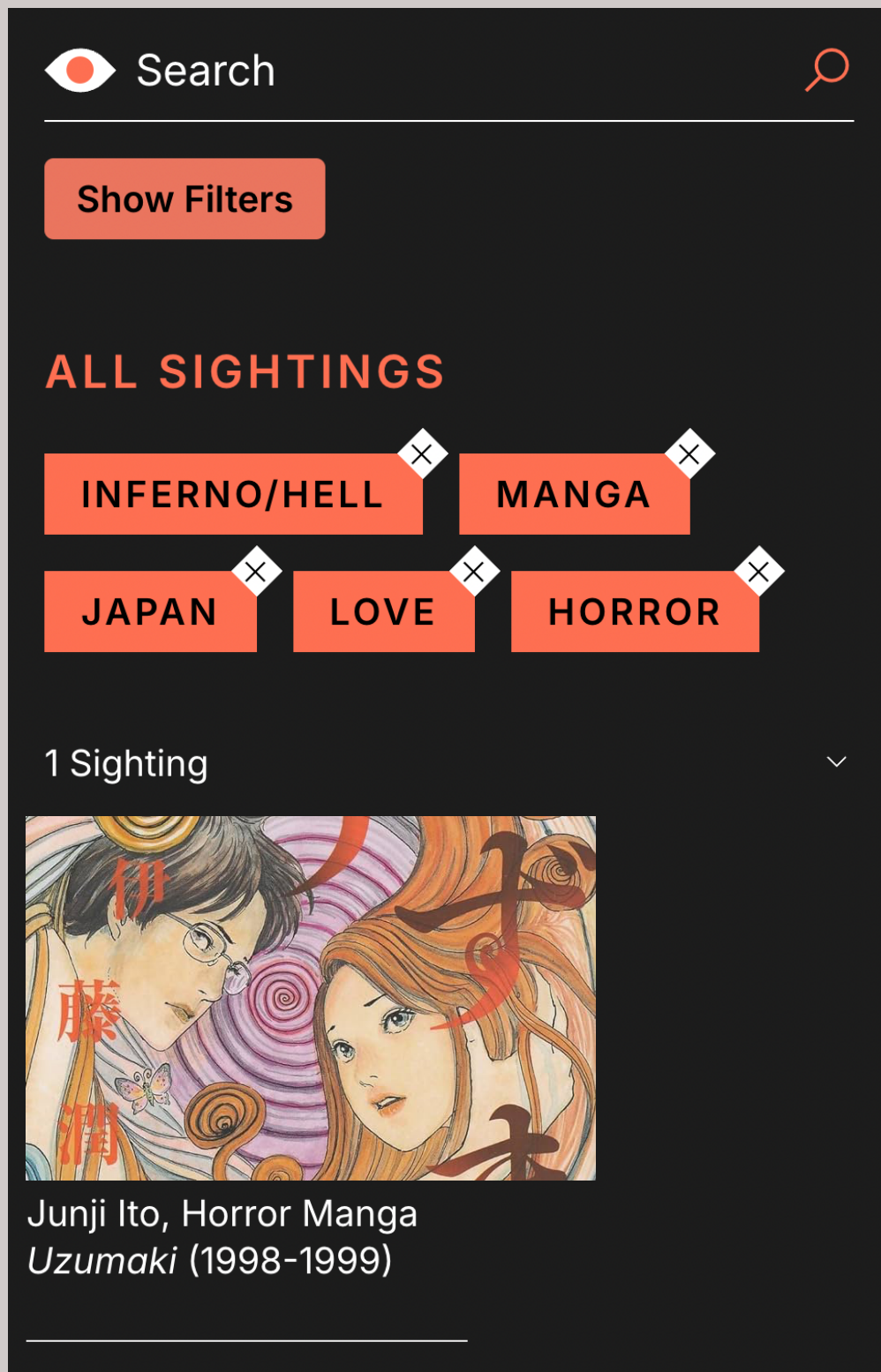


Image 4: Sample result.

Search Results

Tags improve search result relevancy by allowing an unlimited number of tags per post, generating several applicable results. However, even with over 2,000 sightings found, *Dante Today* cannot and will not contain every reference to Dante, limiting its full scope. Though, as data on the site grows, its usefulness will also increase.

Limitations to results may include content predominantly in English and originating from the U.S., as the project was founded at an American university, with many sightings found in an American context. Users should keep this in mind to avoid making sweeping global conclusions.

Statistics

By studying Dante “sightings” through statistical methods, researchers can explicitly understand how Dante’s legacy persists. The filtering capabilities on *Dante Today* allow for analysis of trends in the frequency and distribution of Dante-inspired works across specific decades, continents, or genres.

For example, categorizing sightings broadly by medium (as shown in Figure 1) reveals that most often interpretations of Dante appear in Visual Arts and Written Word, however many diverse works encompass those categories.

Tracking the fluctuations in these statistics in the future may provide insight into Dante’s changing or unchanging cultural relevance over time.

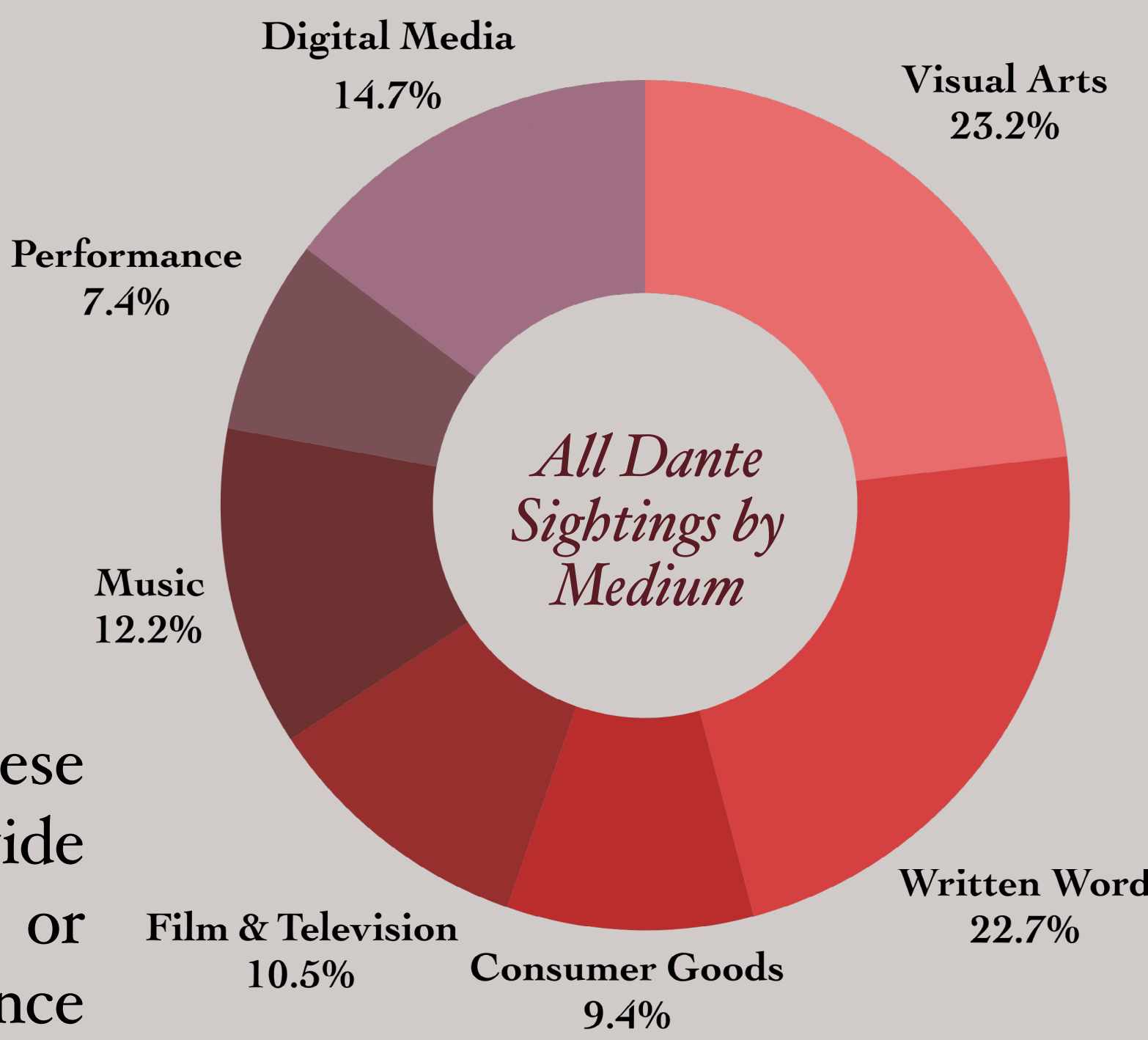


Figure 1: Medium pie chart

Discussion & Theory

The archive and features of *Dante Today* serve as a mediation on the breadth of adaptations Dante has inspired, and speaks to themes of expansion and reception in adaptation theory.

- Reimaginings of Dante through new translations or performances exemplify expansion, adapting the work beyond fidelity to the original, creating new forms that expand upon his themes (Corrigan).
- Dante’s poem *Inferno*, in particular, has manifested in robust and unique forms, such as in a romance-horror Manga, a graphic narrative beyond Dante’s original scope, which features “spiral curses” as an allegorical and literal reference to the circles of hell (Ito, Image 4).
- In terms of reception, the active, internal adaptation that occurs while reading or viewing a work, Dante appears in subtle ways (Corrigan). Even small references to Dante evoke deeply personalized imagery.
- For instance, a political cartoon depicting a “new” circle of hell for a politician mimics Dante’s structure, and cues viewers to consider both the new author’s intent and Dante to interpret the work.

With greater familiarity of Dante-inspired works and their diversity, as presented in the *Dante Today* archive, Dante’s lasting effect in contemporary culture and contributions to adaptation theory are evident.

References

Coggeshall, Elizabeth and Arielle Saiber, eds. *Dante Today: Citings and Sightings of Dante’s Works in Contemporary Culture*. <https://www.dantetoday.org>. Accessed March 1 2025.

Corrigan, Timothy, ‘Defining Adaptation’, in Thomas Leitch (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, Oxford Handbooks (2017; online edn, 5 Apr. 2017).

comprehensive list & further readings:

