

Smithsonian American Art Museum acquires two of our XR art installations

Coinciding with the 250th Anniversary of the United States Declaration of Independence, the founding act of this country, we are honored to announce that the Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM), part of the national museum system of the USA, has acquired two of our XR "extended reality" artworks.

We give deepest thanks and appreciation to SAAM, especially to curator Saisha Grayson, for recognizing our contributions to U.S. American art. The two selected works underscore and highlight our vision of the important issues threatening the stability and future of not only our nation but of the world itself.

Beyond Manzanar, an interactive virtual reality installation (2000, Tamiko Thiel and Zara Houshmand, 2nd edition), focuses on recurring threats by the U.S. government of the mass incarceration of both citizens of the USA, and documented and undocumented residents from targeted ethnic minorities in times of crisis.

ReWildAR, an augmented reality installation (2021, Tamiko Thiel and /p, 1st edition 1), focuses on the need to support native biomes, plants and pollinators in the devastating fossil fuel driven climate change.

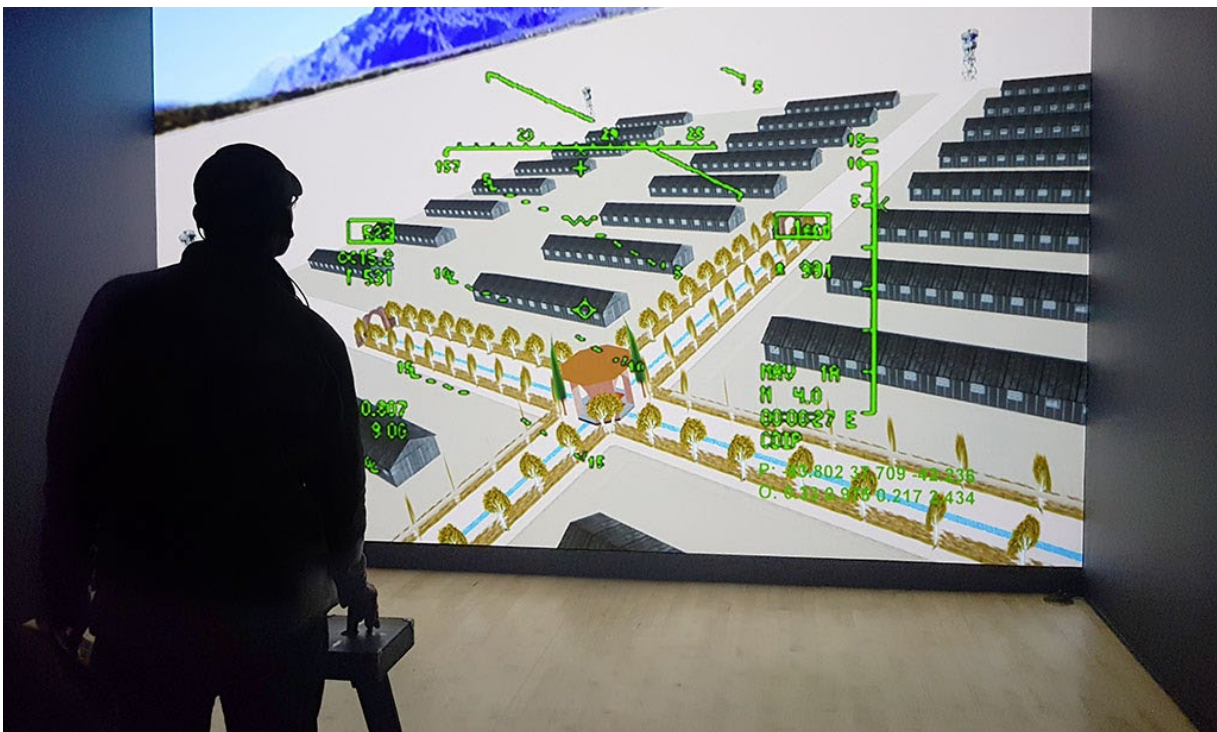
Beyond Manzanar

Interactive virtual reality (VR) immersive projection installation

2000, Tamiko Thiel and Zara Houshmand, 2nd edition

SAAM website: <https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/beyond-manzanar-123137>

Beyond Manzanar website: <https://www.mission-base.com/manzanar/>



Beyond Manzanar in "Almost Human: Digital Art from the Permanent Collection"

San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, California, USA, 2019

Beyond Manzanar is a metaphorical landscape exploring the political scapegoating of ethnic populations in times of crisis. Historic experiences of Japanese Americans in World War II in the Manzanar concentration camp provide the context for imagining a similar threat of incarceration to Iranian Americans, in a surreal and poetic work contrasting immigrant attempts to achieve the American Dream with the demonization of entire ethnic groups identified as “the face of the enemy.”

As a user/participant, you encounter *Beyond Manzanar* through a interactive, immersive, wall-sized projection. Steering freely through the virtual world via a simple joystick, your visual, auditory and kinesthetic senses are engaged to underscore the emotional impact of confinement. In an empathic experience as a prisoner in the Manzanar camp, your eyes see the passes that lead out of the valley, but the barbed-wire fence blocks your path. Your only escape is inwards, inhabiting the memories of those confined. At the heart of the installation is an image of the garden as a place of cultural refuge.

Beyond Manzanar represents the Iranian American experience through imagery from the 1979 Iranian Hostage Crisis, but events since the piece was first conceived—from the US reaction to 9-11, to the mass detentions by ICE, and now an illegal and unprovoked war on Iran—have rendered the artwork increasingly relevant and sadly prophetic. The lies used by the administration to justify the scapegoating and demonization are likewise not a recent phenomenon, as evidence uncovered in the 1970s by Michi Nishiura Weglyn and in 1981 by Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga showed the imprisonment of Japanese Americans during World War II without trial or due process was carried out entirely on false pretenses. [See also Gordon Hirabayashi: 'Can it happen again?' and Rachel Maddow's *Burn Order*]

The distortion of truth continues with the government’s attempt to whitewash the narrative presented to visitors at Manzanar and other national heritage sites, to denigrate our voices as part of the national US American narrative, and its attacks on the integrity of the Smithsonian Institution. We are grateful to the Smithsonian American Art Museum for their efforts to bring the experience of *Beyond Manzanar* to the public regardless.

Production funded by International Academy of Media Arts and Sciences (IAMAS), 1999-2000 in Ogaki City, Gifu/Japan. VRML software developed on a Pentium® III PC donated by Intel Corporation. Generous technical support by blaxxun interactive, Inc. and Bitmanagement Software. Research and prototyping supported by a 1998 Computer Art Grant from WIRED Magazine and the Asian American Arts Foundation.

The first edition of *Beyond Manzanar* was purchased in 2002 by the San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA. It was—to our knowledge—the first virtual reality artwork acquired for a US art museum collection!

(See next page for information on ReWildAR)

ReWildAR

Augmented reality (AR) on mobile devices and/or as Immersive livestream projection
2021, Tamiko Thiel and /p, 1st edition

SAAM website: <https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/rewildar-123077>

ReWildAR website: <https://tamikothiel.com/rewildar-website/>



ReWildAR AR screenshot, in the exhibit "FUTURES," Smithsonian Arts and Industry Building, 2021

ReWildAR offers a vision of how Washington D.C. and other Eastern Seaboard cities in the USA could be rewilded to create a sustainable environment for nature in the city. Rewilding the city means turning open areas and parks, but also planting strips, rooftops etc. from mono-cultivated lawns into wildflower meadows, wetlands or similarly biodiverse biotopes. This project specifically focuses on the symbiotic relationships between native flowers and pollinators that can thrive in a wide range of biomes from Maine in the far north down into Florida, and that are necessary to preserve a diverse and healthy natural environment. This includes not just beloved insects like the Monarch butterfly, but also ones we might see as nuisances, such as moths or wild bees that produce no commercial benefit, but fill ecological niches that our beloved but non-native honey bees cannot.

ReWildAR was commissioned by curator Ashley Molese in collaboration with Smithsonian Gardens for the exhibit "FUTURES," which celebrated the 175th anniversary of the Smithsonian Institution. With the motto "The future is not a fact—it is a decision," this exhibit in the Smithsonian Arts and Industries Building (AIB) challenged us to "imagine the future we want, not the future we fear." As the AIB does not have a collection of its own, we are delighted that the Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM) has stepped in to bring *ReWildAR* into their collection.

We would like to acknowledge that Smithsonian buildings occupy the traditional territory of many Native American nations past and present. The selection of plants in *ReWildAR* are featured at the nearby Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian as traditionally important for these cultures, and from which European-American systems of medicine have profited.