

INTRODUCTION:

Diverse Realities and Identities in the Artworks of Tamiko Thiel

In the 1990s, theories of Cyberfeminism received widespread attention among women artists. Building on Donna Haraway's 1985 "Cyborg Manifesto," the term Cyberfeminism was primarily popularized by the Australian collective VNS Matrix in their "Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century." It was a major building block of what became known as Third Wave Feminism in the 1990s. More and more women began to use the computer and the Internet which at the time were largely considered to be male domains. Theoretically and politically supported by this nascent movement, and coming herself from a technical background – a B.S. in 1979 in Product Design Engineering from Stanford and an M.S. in 1983 in Mechanical Engineering from M.I.T. – Tamiko Thiel turned to media art at the end of her studies at the Munich Academy of Fine Arts in 1991. The Kunstverein Wolfsburg is the only institution to have presented all three of her pioneering early virtual reality installations, in the group exhibitions "Non-Stop" (2005), "Next Level" (2007) and "Reconstructed Zone" (2009). Now, in the solo exhibition "Diverse Realities," this American artist of mixed Japanese and German heritage shows works spanning all decades of her artistic career, from her first video work in 1991 to her latest virtual reality work, and includes some of her larger works that were created together with her important collaborators. This presentation thus acquires a retrospective character.

One aspect that connects all of the works in "Diverse Realities" is that of transformation. It is important to the artist that the digital worlds she creates are not just playful, fantastic landscapes. The starting points for all the works are important social issues related to historical political events

or to critical ecological developments. However, digital technologies also offer the possibility of reinterpreting the female body or reflecting on fundamental processes of human existence. The aspects of interaction or participation are also rightly regarded as one of the central potentials of programmed works of art. For instance, with the help of Deep Fake technology, Tamiko Thiel's work "Lend Me Your Face!" (2020, with /p) asks visitors to the exhibition to surrender control over their faces and words to Deep Fake "driving videos" of prominent people. Or in "Unexpected Growth" (2018/2022, with /p), she submerges Wolfsburg Castle underwater in augmented reality, surrounding it with a colorful coral reef – made of virtual plastic garbage. This locally specific transformation can be seen not only as a large projection in the exhibition, but every user can experience it on their own cell phone or tablet in the surrounding castle gardens as well.

For Tamiko Thiel, the Berlin Wall, the historically most significant intervention in a metropolis and the symbol of the Cold War militarized border that divided Germany into East and West, is a political event that must not be forgotten. Her early Berlin Wall VR work, "Virtuelle Mauer/ReConstructing the Wall" (2008, T+T - Tamiko Thiel and Teresa Reuter), is presented here for the first time in full stereo VR. With work of this kind, she is one of the most outstanding artists creating artworks combining socially relevant themes with innovative forms of digital art.

Justin Hoffmann

Director, Kunstverein Wolfsburg

ATMOS SPHAERAE

Immersive large video projection

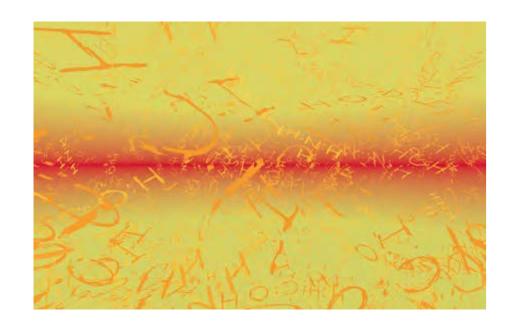
Tamiko Thiel, 2021

Created in virtual reality for the DiMoDA 4.0 VR museum exhibit
"Dis/Location," curated by Christiane Paul.

Original music by Christoph Reiserer Sound engineering by Martin Rieger

Image this page: Gases in the proto-planetary disc.

Image facing page: Greenhouse gas emissions from Anthropocene oil rigs.



A deep time meditation on the changing elemental composition of the Earth's atmosphere.

Atmos Sphaerae uses the poetic beauty of the scientific notation "Lewis structures" to make visible the differences in atomic composition between different atmospheric gases. The experience takes the viewer from the pre Big Bang void through the proto-planetary gas disc, to the lifegiving water, then the Great Oxygenation Event triggered by photosynthesizing cyanobacteria, to the runaway greenhouse triggered by humans' voracious appetite for fossil fuels.



LEND ME YOUR FACE!

Participatory Deep Fake Artificial Intelligence Video Installation
Tamiko Thiel and /p, 2020
With technical collaboration from Christoph Clement*

Image this page: "Lend Me Your Face!" in the exhibit "Götzendämmerung," Artists' Association in the Haus der Kunst, Munich, 2020.

Image facing page: "Lend Me Your Face!" in the exhibit "Yesterday's Fiction," Microwave Media Art Festival Hong Kong, 2021.



In Lend Me Your Face! a neural network animates a single photo of each participating visitor's face to match "driving videos" of leading public figures. The deepfakes are displayed in large projections surrounding the public.

The visitor is confronted with a very personal encounter of how the most intimate and yet public part of the self, the face and the emotions it expresses, can easily be manipulated and placed in contexts out of their control.

* Lend Me Your Face! uses an open source deepfake neural network framework developed by A. Siarohin et al. using the VoxCeleb dataset, extended with "deep-animator," a wrapper created by Dimitris Poulopoulos, and set up with the help of Christoph Clement.



TOUCHING, TRACES: 2020 ELECTION DIARIES

Series of 21 "mini" digital fine art prints, 14x19.5 cm floated on 21x30 cm, Hahnemühle Baryta paper Tamiko Thiel, 2020-2021

I began the Touching, Traces work series as an exploration of the intimacy of touch on mobile device screens. This became even more relevant in 2020, the first year of the coronavirus pandemic. Since it was thought that transmission of the virus was primarily through physical contact, we all became hyperaware of the surfaces we touched and of the traces that may or may not be on those surfaces. For those alone in self-isolation, our mobile devices were the surfaces we touched and stroked most intimately and most often.

As I was following the course of the 2020 US presidential election, my work with Touching, Traces became a mirror of the events I was following online, and codified in my "2020 Election Diaries." These were records of my frantic "doomscrolling" on news sites and Facebook on key days around and after the 2020 election, as Trump and his GOP allies attacked the landslide win by Biden and Harris that knocked him out of office.

As we now know, the attempts culminated in Trump's call to storm the Capitol Building on January 6, 2021. Trump stirred up a violent mob to attack the Senators and Representatives of the United States of America in the Capitol Building as they were meeting to confirm the results of the election. Multiple people died as a result of the attack, and Vice President Pence and others narrowly escaped death by mob violence.

This led to Trump's second impeachment, in which however a majority of the Republicans, whom Trump put in peril of their lives, voted not to convict him.

Living in Europe, isolated from the events in the USA by time and distance, I was desperately trying to make sense of the weird events and the weeks of uncertainty and suspense, and seeking solace in my online community of friends and media analysts.



2020-11-07

Biden-Harris Declared Winners, Trump Refuses to Concede

Four days after the election on Nov. 3rd, Biden-Harris are declared winners. Trump refuses to concede.



2021-01-06

Warnock Ossoff Wins Give Democrats Senate. Trump Rioters Attack Capitol.

Warnock and Ossoff wins in Georgia give Democrats control of the US Senate. Later, Trump exhorts his supporters to attack the Capitol to prevent certification of the election by Congress.



2021-02-13

Majority of GOP Senators Refuse to Convict Trump.

Senator Mitch McConnell said Donald Trump was practically and morally responsible for inciting the events of January 6th, but refused to convict, as did all but 7 GOP senators.

UNEXPECTED GROWTH

Augmented reality installation
Tamiko Thiel and /p, 2018

First edition commissioned by and in the collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Second edition auctioned to a private collector at Christie's New York sale "Proof of Sovereignty," 2021.

Image this page: Tamiko Thiel and /p with Unexpected Growth on the terrace of the Whitney Museum of American Art, 2018

Image facing page: Unexpected Growth in front of Wolfsburg Castle, Wolfsburg, Germany, 2022



Perturbations in the natural order have torn the fabric of the space-time continuum, and unexpected growths are seeping into our world — perhaps from our own future. Augmented reality apps transform our mobile devices into "ARscopes" — allowing us to see into these parallel dimensions that coexist and overlay our own so-called "reality."

One such growth was first discovered on the 6th floor terrace of the Whitney Museum of American Art in 2018 (see image on this page), and has since been reported in locations far from the seas, such as shown in Wolfsburg, Germany on the facing page. Central Europe was underwater in the distant past – are these ocean growths implying that our future will also be underwater?

The growths seem to be an odd mixture of coral animals and plastic. They are clearly following principles of Lindenmayer systems: algorithmic, branching growth as is common in many corals. It is unclear however how the plastics are becoming incorporated into living systems, and what effects these coral-plastic symbioses will have on the larger ecosystems, especially on animals all along the foodchain — up to human beings — who feed off of sea flora and fauna. Are such symbioses our future, as plastic waste becomes more numerous than the fish in the sea?



LAND OF CLOUD

Stereo virtual reality and spatial sound installation By Tamiko Thiel, 2017-2018

Google VR Tilt Brush artist in residence, San Francisco, 2017 Winner of the Audience Award, VRHAM VR festival, Hamburg, 2018

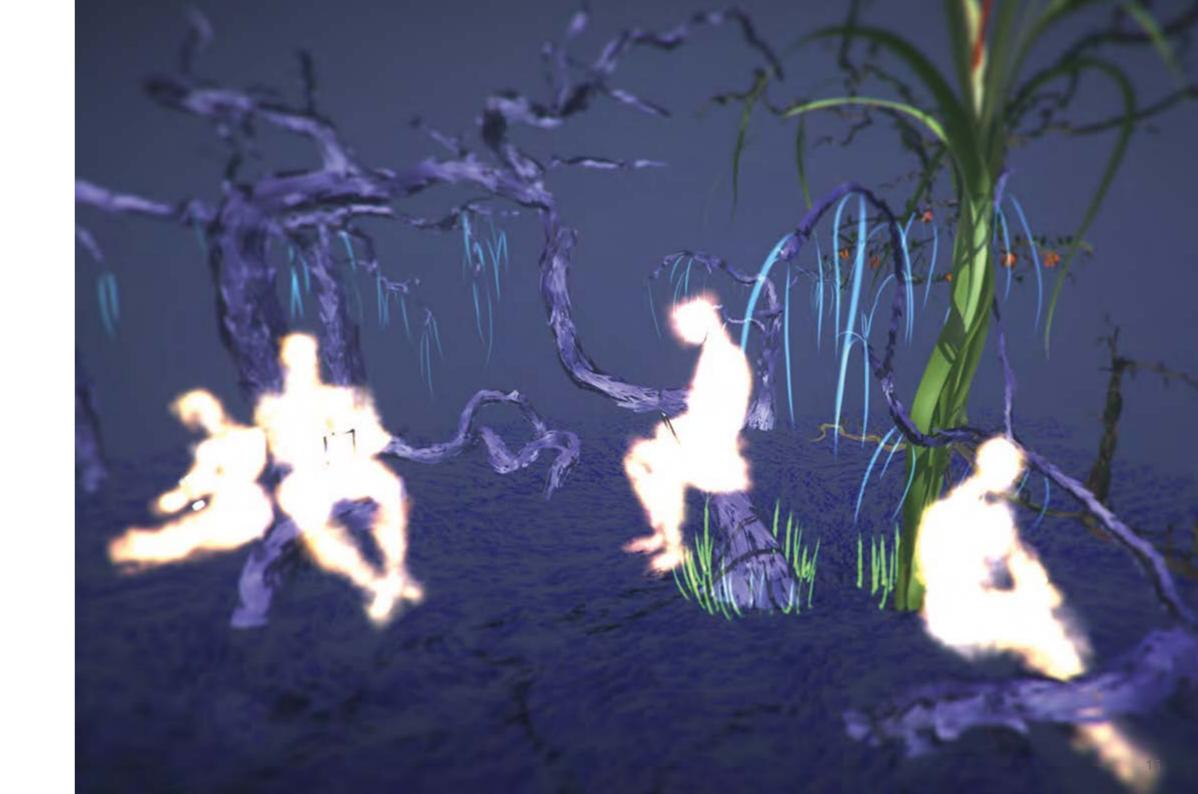


Three days journey beyond Space and Time lies the Land of Cloud. The people there are silent. They communicate not through speech, gesture or gaze, but instead through strange and wondrous "cloud mirrors." These devices keep them in constant contact with their deity, The Cloud, in whose image they are created — their bodies are themselves composed of softly billowing clouds.

The Land of Cloud is a beautiful garden, but the Cloud People are oblivious to their surroundings. They stare into their devices, motionless, spellbound by whispers from The Cloud. The garden slowly envelops them in its boughs.

If you visit the Land of Cloud, you will hear a susurration of voices when you enter the space. If you walk up to a Cloud Person, sit or lie down next to them and place your head in their head, you will hear that each one repeats its own mantra, given by the Cloud Deity.

All mantras are from the 2016 USA election campaign.



VIRTUELLE MAUER / RECONSTRUCTING THE WALL

Interactive virtual reality large-screen installation, 2008 Stereo VR version for Oculus Rift/Quest 2 + Link, 2022 T+T (Tamiko Thiel and Teresa Reuter)

Supported by a 2007 Hauptstadtkulturfonds grant (Berlin Capital City Cultural Fund) as an integral part of the Berlin Wall Memorial Concept of the City-State of Berlin.

Winner of the 2009 IBM Innovation Award for Art and Technology, Boston Cyberarts.



It is over 30 years since the Fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989. Most people alive today have never seen it in real life. This artwork recreates a kilometer-long section of the Wall and its surrounding neighborhoods in East and West Berlin, depicting the radical changes made over the 28 years of its existence.

Exploring the virtual space with a simple thumbwheel, users' own movements and actions trigger dramatic encounters with events spanning from the 1960s to the 2000s. In West Berlin users can tour the colorful graffiti on the West Wall and hear stories of past events; in East Berlin there is a hushed silence and users find that approaching the Wall and its checkpoints can have severe consequences.

Users are protagonists in a surrealist dream – not as all-powerful border guards, but in the role of normal Berlin residents living "in the shadow of the Wall."



GOLDSEGEN / GOLDEN BLESSINGS

Participatory augmented reality public art project and wall hanging Tamiko Thiel, 2014 - 2017/2022

Commissioned as part of the public art project "Das Rätsel des Überflüssigen" ("Conundrum of the Superfluous") by Serafine Lindemann | artcircolo with pilotraum01 e.V., GCN and DantonDenkRaum, for Klimaherbst München 2014



"How much do you need to be happy?"

I asked people to write their answers to this question on a whiteboard, then took augmented photos of them with their answers, standing in a shower of lucky gold coins. I printed out the image on the spot – one copy for them to take home as a lucky charm, the other copy to create a participatory wall hanging.





METAMORPHOSES

Digital print series, 1997

Left image:

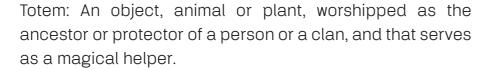
Metamorphoses: AMPH-X01, 1997

Digital print, 61.4 cm wide x 76.5 cm high

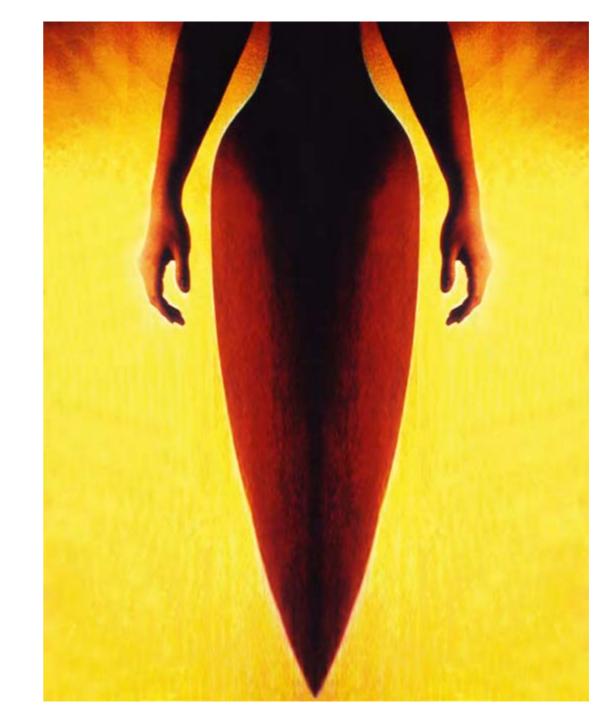
Right image:

Metamorphoses: AMPH-X02, 1997

Digital print, 61.4 cm wide x 51.2 cm high



The Totem Project is a series of works that use technology to reclaim a sense of the human body as mysterious and powerful, a source of mythic significance. Through the eye of the camera I seek this transformation from the human to the numinous, from the mortal body to that of its totemic protector.





TOTEM OF HEAVENLY WISDOM

Single channel version of 5-channel CRT video sculpture, 1996 Supported by a Bay Area Video Coalition (BAVC) Artist's Equipment Access Grant, San Francisco, 1996.

Original music by Teed Rockwell

Image this page: Tamiko Thiel with Totem of Heavenly Wisdom 5-channel video sculpture. In the group exhibit "Plugged In," Haines Gallery, San Francisco/USA. 1998.

Image facing page: Totem of Heavenly Wisdom, single channel still image.



I search for abstract forms and movements of the human body that trigger powerful associations with the processes of life and death, transforming images of "innocent" body parts into fetishistic objects, projections of the viewer's own desires and fears.

In the original Totem of Heavenly Wisdom video sculpture, five CRT monitors created a "video totem pole" taller than a human being. The single channel version brings the 5 channels onto a single, vertically oriented 9:16 monitor.

The music was composed and performed by Teed Rockwell to fit the character of the totemic beast. It is a synthesis of East Indian classical music and western jazz/rock traditions.



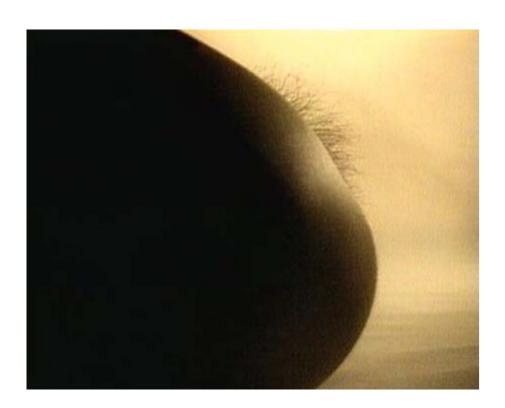
GOLDEN SEED

Video installation

Music: Russian Orthodox liturgy

Tamiko Thiel, 1991

Diploma exhibit for Academy of Fine Arts Munich, 1991
Finalist in "Deutsche Videokunstpreis," ZKM Karlsruhe, Germany, 1992
(under the name "Das Goldene Ei/ The Golden I")



The Golden Seed was the first artwork of my Totem Project. It is a moving votive image celebrating the cycles of life: birth, death, regeneration.

I seek symbols that have similar meanings in many different cultures. Gold is a symbol of light, immortality and divinity. The egg and the dark, damp Mother Earth are symbols of fertility and the cycles of birth and death.

As I developed the video artwork further, the images evoked the sowing of seed and harvesting of grain - the Demeter and Persephone myth of the Eleusian Mysteries in Ancient Greece.

- " ...and soon, as spring progresses, the long ears of grain would ripple like a horse's mane in the wind, and the fertile furrows would fill with harvested corn..."
- Homeric Hymn to Demeter





Photo: Daniel Sammans, wet plate collodion print

BIOGRAPHY

Tamiko Thiel www.tamikothiel.com

Tamiko Thiel was awarded the 2018 IX Visionary Pioneer Award by SAT Montreal for lifetime achievement creating media artworks exploring place, space, the body and cultural identity in political and socially critical artworks. Starting as a product design mechanical engineer with degrees from Stanford and MIT, she was lead product designer on Danny Hillis' Connection Machine CM-1/CM-2 (1986/1987), the first commercial artificial intelligence supercomputer and in 1989 the fastest computer in the world. These machines influenced Google's AI technology, inspired Steve Jobs' designs, and are in the collections of MoMA NY and the Smithsonian Institution. Thiel has subsequently used AI technology to create artworks such as her Lend Me Your Face! (2020, with /p) deepfake AI video installation.

Her first VR work was as producer/creative director of Starbright World (1994-1997), the first 3D online metaverse world for children, in collaboration with Steven Spielberg. Her VR artwork Beyond Manzanar (2000, with Zara Housmand), was one of the first VR artworks collected by a US art museum (in 2002, by the San Jose Museum of Art in Silicon Valley). Her interactive large projection VR Virtuelle Mauer/ReConstructing the Wall (2008, with Teresa Reuter) was supported by Berlin's Capitol City Cultural Fund and won the IBM Innovation Award for Art and Technology in 2009. It is being shown for the first time as a full stereo VR experience in "Diverse Realites." Other major VR artworks include Land of Cloud,

created for a GoogleVR Tilt Brush Artist in Residence and winner of the VRHAM Audience Award in 2018, and Atmos Sphaerae, created for the DiMoDA 4.0 VR exhibit "Dis/Location" curated by Christiane Paul.

As a founding member of the group Manifest.AR Thiel participated in their groundbreaking augmented reality intervention into MoMA NY in 2010 with her ARt Critic Face Matrix, and was the main curator/organisator of their AR intervention at the Venice Biennale in 2011, including her work Shades of Absence, Many AR commissions followed: Biomer Skelters (2013, with Will Pappenheimer) from FACT Liverpool, Brush the Sky (2015, with Midori Kono Thiel) from Wing Luke Museum of the Asian-Pacific Experience, Gardens of the Anthropocene (2016) from Seattle Art Museum. The 1st edition of her AR installation Unexpected Growth (2018, with /p) was commissioned by and is in the collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art. The 2nd edition was auctioned in 2021 in the first curated sale of NFTs at Christie's New York, Lady Phe's "Proof of Sovereignty," for which Thiel required Christie's to develop a more sustainable Proof of Stake NFT minting process for their platform. Her most recent AR commissions include ReWildAR (2021, with /p) for the 175th anniversary of the Smithsonian Institution, and ARpothecary's Garden (2022), created for Roche's 125th anniversary ARTour Basel curated by Sabine Himmelsbach, and now in the Roche Basel Art Collection.

Thiel has works in various private collections as well, including works from her digital print series Touching, Traces in the collections of fellow media art pioneers Eduardo Kac and Lynn Hershman Leeson.

CURRICULUM VITAE

1957 Born in Oakland, California, USA to Philip Thiel and Midori Kono Thiel. Childhood in Kamakura/Japan and Seattle/USA.

EDUCATION

- 1991 Academy of Fine Arts, Munich, Germany.Diploma in Applied Graphics with Gerhard Berger; studies with Daniel Spoerri and Jörg Immendorf.
- 1983 MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE of TECHNOLOGY, Cambridge, MA, USA. M.S. in Mechanical Engineering. Studies in Biomechanics Lab and in precursor to MIT Media Lab.
- 1979 STANFORD UNIVERSITY, Stanford, CA, USA. B.S. in General Engineering/Product Design, Human-Machine Interface

COLLECTIONS

MUSEUM of MODERN ART, New York, NY. Connection Machine CM-2 WHITNEY MUSEUM of AMERICAN ART, New York, NY. Unexpected Growth SAN JOSE MUSEUM of ART, San Jose, Beyond Manzanar SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, Washington DC. Connection Machine CM-2 KUNSTSAMMLUNG ROCHE BASEL, ARpothecary's Garden AR installation EDUARDO KAC Collection, Touching, Traces: 2020-05-14, fine art print LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON Collection, Touching, Traces: 2020 Election Diaries fine art prints

SELECTED AWARDS, RESIDENCIES, COMMISSIONS

- 2022 LUMEN PRIZE / BCS Immersive Environment Award Longlist.
 SUNDANCE INSTITUTE | UNITY CHARITABLE FUND GRANT.
- 2021 CHRISTIE'S NEW YORK first curated NFT sale "Proof of Sovereignty."

 SUNDANCE INSTITUTE Art of Practice Fellow, 2021 2022.

 SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, AR commission for 175th anniversary.

 THE PHOTOGRAPHERS' GALLERY, London, AI commission.
- 2020 NANTESBUCH FOUNDATION commission.
- 2018 WHITNEY MUSEUM of AMERICAN ART, AR commision.

 iX VSIONARY PIONEER AWARD, SAT Montreal, Canada.

 VRHAM VR Festival Hamburg, Audience Award.
- 2017 GOOGLE VR TILT BRUSH Artist in Residence, San Francisco, USA.
 NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS Boston Cyberarts AR exhibit.
- 2015 SEATTLE ART MUSEUM, AR commission
- 2013 MACDOWELL COLONY Fellow, Peterborough, NH, USA.
- 2012 FACT LIVERPOOL commission for bio-sensing AR artworks
- 2009 IBM INNOVATION AWARD for Artistic Creation in Art and Technology
- 2007 HAUPTSTADTKULTURFONDS (Berlin Capital City Fund) Award
- 2006 YOUNG ART/NEW MEDIA AWARD, Munich.
- 2004 MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE of TECHNOLOGY, CAVS Fellow
- 2003 JAPAN FOUNDATION / KYOTO ART CENTER Fellowship.
- 2001 ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION, New Media Arts Fellowship nominee.
- 998 WIRED MAGAZINE Computer Art Award.
- 1992 DEUTSCHE VIDEOKUNSTPREIS Finalist, ZKM Karlsruhe, Germany.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS 2009-2022

2022 KUNSTVEREIN WOLFSBURG, "Diverse Realities" work overview.
 MEET DIGITAL CULTURE CENTER, Milan. AR immersive installation.
 2021 THE PHOTOGRAPHERS' GALLERY, London. deepfake AI net art.
 DAM PROJECTS BERLIN, "Virtual Berlin Wall" VR and fine art prints.
 2016 SEATTLE ART MUSEUM, Olympic Sculpture Park AR commission.

2009 HARVARD UNIVERSITY / GOETHE-INSTITUT BOSTON

AMERICAN MUSEUM / GOETHE-INSTITUT WA, D.C.

BOSTON CYBERARTS FESTIVAL / GOETHE-INSTITUT BOSTON

GALLERY [DAM] BERLIN, Germany. ReVisioning the Virtual Wall.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS 2009-2022

ARTour Basel, curator Sabine Himmelsbach.
GAZELLI ART HOUSE, London. DiMoDA 4.0 "Dis/Location," curator Christiane Paul.
DAM PROJECTS, Berlin. "Command + Control + Q", curator Anna Meinecke.
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION AIB, "FUTURES" 175th anniversary exhibition, curator Ashley Molese.
"5th BIENNIAL," Artists Association in Haus der Kunst, Munich
"LICHTSICHT TRIENNIAL," Bad Rothenfelde, Germany.
GALLERY PRISKA PASQUER, Cologne, Germany, 20th anniversary

2019 MUSEUM of MODERN ART, New York. "Energy," curators Paola

PINAKOTHEK der MODERNE MUNICH, PIN. preview benefit auction.

MUSEUM SINCLAIR-HAUS, "Illusionary Nature," Bad Homburg

SAN JOSE MUSEUM of ART, San Jose, CA. "Almost Human:

Digital Art from the Permanent Collection"

Antonelli/Anna Burckhardt.

- 2018 WHITNEY MUSEUM of AMERICAN ART, "Programmed: Rules,Codes, and Choreographies in Art, 1965–2018," curator Christiane Paul.
- 2017 MUSEUM of MODERN ART, New York. "Thinking Machines," Curators Sean Anderson/Giampaolo Bianconi PRISKA PASQUER GALLERY, "RESET III and Virtual Reality," Cologne, Germany. Curator Tina Sauerländer. MOVING IMAGE NEW YORK Art Fair. New York.
- 2015 WING LUKE MUSEUM / SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION AFFILIATE, Seattle, USA. "Construct/S," Curator Stacey Uradomo.
- 2012 ART GWANGJU Art Fair, Korea / THE ART SYN PROJECTS London. BROAD ART CENTER, Los Angeles, USA. "LA Re.Play" AR public art.
- 2011 VENICE BIENNALE, Italy. "Manifest.AR AR Intervention."

 ISTANBULBIENNIAL, parallel program "ISEA2011/UNCONTAINABLE"

 ICA BOSTON, USA. "Manifest.AR@ICA," curator George Fifield.
- 2010 MUSEUM of MODERN ART NY. "We AR in MoMA," AR intervention. PALAZZO MEDICI-RICCARDI, Florence, Italy. "Colorito."
- 2009 FONDAZIONE QUERINI STAMmiPALIA, Venice, Italy. "Concordanze." LABORAL CENTRO de ARTE, Gijon, Spain. "FEEDFORWARD," curators Steve Dietz & Christiane Paul.

PUBLISHING DETAILS

First published for the exhibition "Diverse Realities,"
2 Sept. - 6 Nov. 2022 at Kunstverein Wolfsburg,
38448 Wolfsburg, Germany

© Tamiko Thiel, 2022

ISBN: 978-3-9824895-0-6

Published by Tamiko Thiel tamiko@alum.mit.edu - www.tamikothiel.com

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Catalog Front Cover: sensomatic design; Unexpected

Growth image Tamiko Thiel

Catalog Design: Skylla & Lametta Designbüro

THANKS TO:

Kunstverein Wolfsburg

