



Biography

Tamiko Thiel was awarded the 2018 iX Immersive Experiences Visionary Pioneer Award for her life work by the Society for Art and Technology Montreal. Born in 1957, she is a visual artist exploring the interplay of place, space, the body and cultural identity in works encompassing a supercomputer, objects, installations, digital prints in 2D and 3D, videos, interactive 3d virtual worlds (VR), augmented reality (AR) and artificial intelligence (AI).

Thiel received her B.S. in 1979 from Stanford University in Product Design Engineering, with an emphasis on human factors. She received her M.S. in Mechanical Engineering in 1983 from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), with a focus on human-machine design at the Biomechanics Lab and computer graphics at the precursors to the MIT Media Lab. She then earned a Diploma (Master of Arts equivalent) in Applied Graphics in 1991 from the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, Germany, specializing in video installation art.

Her first “artwork” was as lead product designer for Danny Hillis’ Connection Machine CM-1/CM-2 artificial intelligence supercomputer (1986/1987, and in 1989 the fastest machine in the world). Surviving machines are in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art New York and the Smithsonian Institution. She left product design to become a media artist in the mid 1980s, but came full circle to her roots in artificial intelligence in 2020 with the deepfake AI artwork Lend Me Your Face! (with /p). This work premiered in the Götzendämmerung exhibit of the Artists Association in Haus der Kunst Munich as a 6-channel room installation. The Photographers Gallery London then commissioned a net art version Go Fake Yourself! in 2021.

She began working with virtual reality in 1994 as creative director and producer of the Starbright World (1994-1997) online VR playspace for seriously ill children, in collaboration with Steven Spielberg. Her first VR artwork Beyond Manzanar (2000, with Zara Houshmand), was one of the first VR artworks to be acquired for the collection of a US art museum (San Jose Museum of Art, in 2002). In 2017 she was Google VR Tilt Brush artist in residence, creating the VR artwork Land of Cloud, winner of the 2018 People’s Choice Award at the VRHAM VR festival in Hamburg.

A founding member of the cyberartist group Manifest.AR, she participated in 2010 in the pathbreaking augmented reality (AR) intervention “We AR in MoMA,” an uninvited guerilla takeover of MoMA New York. Thiel’s Art Critic Face Matrix at MoMA was featured in articles in the New York Times and on WNYC (National Public Radio). In 2011 she led the Manifest.AR Venice Biennial AR Intervention, placing her work series Shades of Absence in St Marks Place and the Venice Giardini. This led to an invitation to participate in the ISEA UNCONTAINABLE official parallel program to the 2011 Istanbul Biennial and to numerous AR commissions, including in 2013 for FACT Liverpool’s 10th anniversary, and in 2016 for the Seattle Art Museum’s Olympic Sculpture Park.

In 2018 the Whitney Museum NY commissioned her AR installation Unexpected Growth (with /p), now in the Whitney collection. In 2021 the Smithsonian Institution commissioned her AR installation ReWildAR for their 175th anniversary show FUTURES, and Roche Pharmaceutical commissioned her AR interactive installation ARpothecary’s Garden for their 125th anniversary (now in the Roche Basel Art Collection).

In 2021 she was a Sundance Institute Art of Practice Fellow and in 2022 was awarded a Sundance/Unity for Humanity grant. Previous awards and fellowships include the MIT Center for Advances Visual Studies, the Macdowell Colony, Eyebeam New York Art and Technology Center, WIRED Magazine, IBM Innovation Award for Artistic Creation in Art and Technology, Art Council England, Wellcome Trust, Japan Foundation and the Berlin Capital City Cultural Fund. As AR Artistic Advisor for the Caribbean Cultural Center/African Diaspora Institute from 2013-2016 she helped win a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation Cultural Innovation Fund for Mi Querido Barrio, an AR project in East Harlem. As AR artistic advisor for the Hidden Histories of San Jose Japantown project she helped them win an Immersive Technology in the Arts award from the Knight Foundation and Microsoft.

Other international exhibitions include the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) New York, the International Center for Photography New York, Pinakothek der Moderne Munich, ICA London, ICA Boston, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Fondazione Querini Stampalia Venice, Ars Electronica in Linz/Austria and the Centre Pompidou Paris. In 2022 she was honored with a retrospective at the Kunstverein Wolfsburg/Germany.