



Biography

Tamiko Thiel has received multiple honors for her life's work 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). In 2018 she received the SAT Montreal iX Visionary Pioneer Award, and in 2022 was honored with a retrospective at the Kunstverein Wolfsburg in Germany. In 2024 CAI (Contemporary Art Issue) Magazine ranked her in the top 10 most famous digital artists in the world; she was part of the inaugural cohort inducted into the new AWE XR Hall of Fame; and SIGGRAPH, the world's premiere organization for computer graphics in industry, academia and the arts, honored her with the Distinguished Artist Lifetime Achievement for Digital Art.

Thiel was born in Oakland, CA USA as the daughter of Professor Philip Thiel (Architecture and Urban Planning, University of Washington/Seattle), and Japanese arts specialist Midori Kono Thiel. She grew up mostly in Seattle but spent formative time in Kamakura, Japan from 2-5 and 10-11 years old, attending Japanese schools. She absorbed Bauhaus influences via her father and his mentor Gyorgy Kepes (founder, MIT CAVS), and Japanese influences through her mother's diverse professional artistic activities in Japanese fine arts, performing arts and Japanese calligraphy.

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 (M.A. equivalent) in Applied Graphics in 1991 from the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, Germany, specializing in video installation art.

She was lead product designer on Danny Hillis' *Connection Machines CM-1/CM-2* (1986/1987) at the MIT AI Lab startup Thinking Machines Corporation. These were the first commercial artificial intelligence supercomputers and in 1989 and 1993 the fastest supercomputers 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. Her own AI artworks include *Lend Me Your Face!* (2020, with /p) deepfake video installation, and *I am Sound* (2016, with Christoph Reiserer) a generative audio visual selfie installation.

Her first VR was as producer/creative director of *Starbright World* (1994-1997), the first Metaverse for children, in collaboration with Steven Spielberg. Her own VR artwork *Beyond Manzanar* (2000, with Zara Houshmand), an interactive large screen VR projection installation, was the first VR artwork collected by a US art museum when the San Jose Museum of Art bought it in 2002. In 2025, the Smithsonian American Art Museum acquired the 2nd edition for their collection. Subsequent VR artworks include *The Travels of Mariko Horo* (2006, with music by Ping Jin), funded by a Japan Foundation fellowship and an MIT Center for Advanced Visual Studies fellowship, and *Virtuelle Mauer/ReConstructing the Wall* (2008, T+T (Tamiko Thiel and Teresa Reuter)), funded by a Berlin Capital City Cultural Funds grant and winner of the IBM Innovation Award for Artistic Creation in Art and Technology at the 2009 Boston Cyberarts Festival. Using more recent VR technology she created *Land of Cloud* (2017) as GoogleVR Tilt Brush Artist in Residence, which won the audience award at the inaugural VRHAM Festival in 2018. She created the VR artwork *Atmos Sphaerae* (2021) for the exhibition „Dis/Location,“ curated by Whitney Museum media art curator Christiane Paul for the

DiMoDA 4.0 VR virtual museum, and is working on a mixed reality installation on the creation of life on Earth, *Elemental Spaces*, with funding from Film- und Fernsehfonds Bayern.

A founding member of the augmented reality (AR) artist group Manifest.AR, she participated in 2010 in the pathbreaking 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 Piazza San Marco and the Venice Giardini. Invitational AR shows and new commissions included the ICA Boston, the 2011 Istanbul Biennial, *Biomer Skelters* (2013, with Will Pappenheimer) at FACT Liverpool, *Brush the Sky* (2015, with Midori Kono Thiel) at Wing Luke Museum of the Asian-Pacific Experience, *Gardens of the Anthropocene* (2016) at the Seattle Art Museum Sculpture Park, *Unexpected Growth* (2018, with /p) at the Whitney Museum (the 1st edition is in the collection and the 2nd edition was auctioned as a NFT at Christie's NY), *ReWildAR* (2021, with /p) at the 175th anniversary of the Smithsonian Institution (now in the collection), *ARpothecary’s Garden* (2022, commissioned by and for the Roche Art Collection Basel), *What You Sow* (2023, with /p), for the AR Biennial of the NRW-Forum Düsseldorf, and *Vera Plastica* (2023, with /p), commissioned for the BROICH Digital Art Museum collection by DAM Projects Berlin.

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, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Fondazione Querini Stampalia Venice, Ars Electronica in Linz/Austria and the Centre Pompidou Paris. Other awards include a Sundance Institute Art of Practice Fellowship, a Sundance/Unity for Humanity grant, a fellowship at the Macdowell Colony and at Eyebeam New York, and grants from WIRED Magazine, the Art Council England and the Wellcome Trust.

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.