

Billionaire Peter Thiel makes rare visit to New Zealand



By [Matt Nippert](#)

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Artist Simon Denny's interpretation of Peter Thiel as a character in imagined board game 'Ascent - Above the Nation State'. Photo / Supplied

Technology billionaire Peter Thiel has made a rare visit to New Zealand, checking out an art gallery hosting an exhibition by prominent local artist Simon Denny exploring some of his more outlandish ideas.

The exhibit, [on show at the Michael Lett gallery until December 22](#), has Denny using the medium of board games to contrast the philosophies of libertarian Thiel with the communal outlook of New Zealand writer Max Harris.

Thiel has expressed support for a range of projects seeking to overcome social and medical limits on humanity, including funding research for life-extension technologies and promoting the idea of "Seasteading" - ocean-based communities free from government control.

He is also a high-profile public and financial backer of then-longshot and outsider Republican Party presidential candidate Donald Trump.

By chance Harris, author of the *New Zealand Project*, was visiting the gallery on Saturday morning at the same time Thiel and his small entourage of men wearing shorts and polo shirts were paying a flying visit.

Harris said Thiel was directed by one of his crew to a large rendering of him imagined as a green-skinned *Dungeons & Dragons*-style knight battling the forces of democracy and free elections.

"Look, it's you!," the billionaire tech founder was told.

The two subjects of the exhibition had a brief conversation. Harris asked what the San Francisco internet oligarch made of the show at the K Rd gallery.

He seemed impressed.

He said that Thiel responded: "It's, uh, actually a work of phenomenal detail."

Gallery manager Andrew Tomas confirmed the account and that Thiel appeared to enjoy the work, but said it was a private venue and he was unwilling to comment further.

The other part to the Thiel-themed half of the exhibit is a remake of popular game *Settlers of Catan*, where players seek to control first a decaying earth, then New Zealand,

then Seasteading communities before leaving earth behind and vying for control of Mars or the moon.

According to **Forbes** Thiel is worth \$3.7 billion, making him the 317th richest man in the world, largely off the back of founding PayPal, a spectacularly profitable 2004 investment in Facebook, and his data-analysis-for-spies software company Palantir.

The **Herald** revealed in January Thiel had controversially obtained New Zealand citizenship in 2011 after then-Internal Affairs minister Nathan Guy had agreed his exceptional philanthropy and entrepreneurism outweighed the fact he'd only visited the country for 12 days.

Since Guy's decision, Thiel's been conspicuously absent from the country and has wound down his involvement with New Zealand.

His Valar Ventures company now lists his high-profile investment with Xero as an exited investment, cashing out with hundreds of millions of dollars in profits.

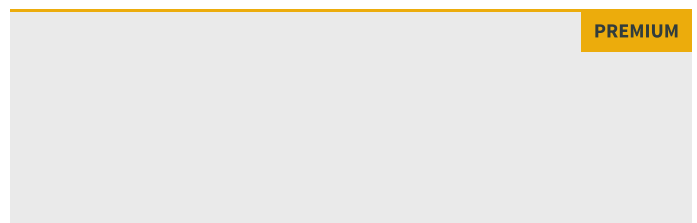
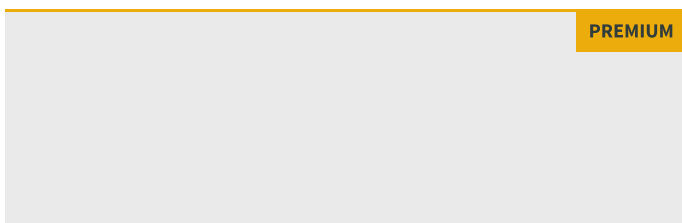
His largest remaining local investment is a 193 hectare block of farmland bordering Lake Wanaka he purchased for \$13.5m in 2015. The deal did not require Overseas Investment Office approval due to his status as a citizen.

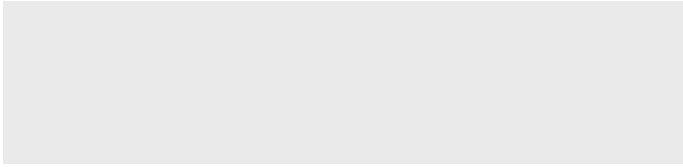
Thiel has made no public comment on the citizenship controversy that erupted in Parliament following the Herald's report in January.

Ten times over the past year the **Herald** has posed questions about his New Zealand activities to Thiel's representatives in New Zealand, and none have been answered.

Questions sent yesterday about his current New Zealand trip similarly received no response.

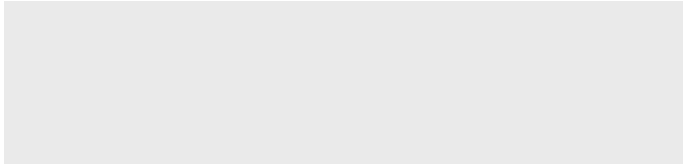
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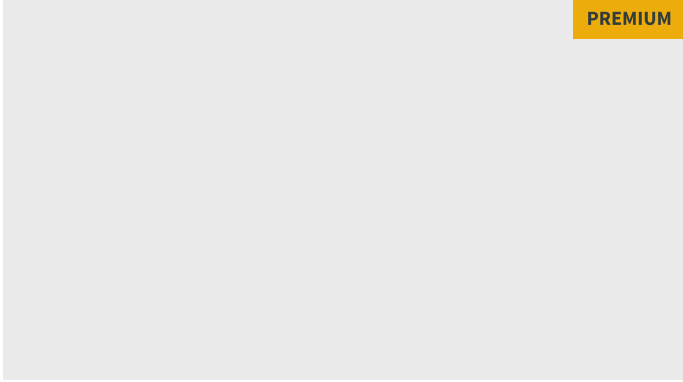
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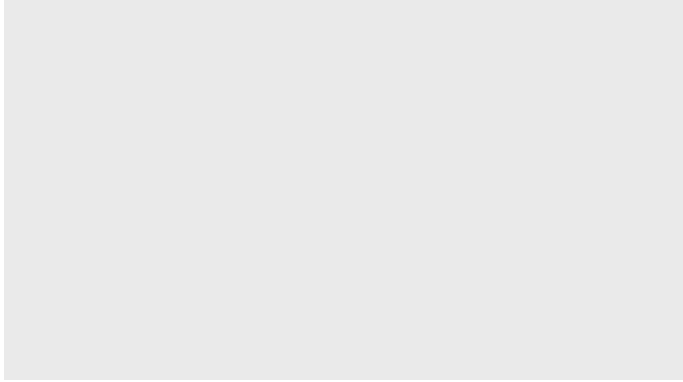
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