

# Amazing App Turns Your Phone Into Picasso's 3-D Pen

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## DRAWING 3-D SCULPTURES WITH YOUR PHONE IS AS INCREDIBLE AS IT SOUNDS.

In 1949, **Pablo Picasso** teamed up with the *LIFE* photographer **Gjon Mili** [to paint sculptures with a flashlight](#). In 2015, Disney animator **Glen Keane** used an HTC Vive virtual reality headset and a Tilt Brush [to draw \*The Little Mermaid's\* Ariel in 3-D](#).

Now, I'm walking around a hip coffee shop, waving an iPhone 6+ in the air. I draw 15-foot spirals, and of course, I spell out my name in giant letters. I must look insane to the baristas—akin to **Will Ferrell's** grand finale dance scene of *Old School*—but every time I look at the screen, it's worth the humiliation. Somehow, magically, a completely unmodified smartphone had tracked my movements in 3-D space, just like **Picasso's** pen of light.

It's a web app called [Air Pencil](#)—and who would have thought that I had **advertising** to thank for its existence?

**Nils Forsblom** is a Finnish-American engineer who founded [Adtile](#), a turnkey solution to serving more beautiful ads on mobile devices. His company's differentiator was one of **design**. Make ads look less horrible; make them cheap and easy for marketers to build; and, most of all, make them feel like they belonged on the phone. So his company, which with only 18 employees, now serves native ads across all **LG** phones, invested heavily in taking advantage of the specialized hardware of the smartphone: the magnetometers, the accelerometers, and the gyroscopes. To create ads that tilted and responded to new sorts of gestures, they created what **Forsblom** claims is the most advanced software technology to read a phone's position in the world. It can see the X, Y, and Z axis of movements, all without using a 3-D, depth-sensing camera to map a room like **Google's** [Project Tango](#).

Just a few years later, and Adtile has become both a profitable and scalable business. So **Forsblom**, who is looking to get ahead of the next trends in mobile and VR, turned back to his roots. He grew up in his family's art gallery, which would open strange and fascinating doors. At age 10, he'd poke around the studio of **Anish Kapoor**, who taught him tricks like how to sculpt spirals out of styrofoam. Eventually, **Forsblom** would see the potential of his ad technology through the lens of his artistic past: The algorithms inside this **advertising** tool could actually be used to create 3-D sculptures.

Which brings us back to the present, as I'm waving this iPhone through space. The tracking is not always perfect—the K of my "MARK" somehow falls off the end—but it is incredible when it works. I draw what I believe is a perfect circle, wait a moment for the phone to process the movement, and check the screen. In fact, I've drawn something more akin to a big keyring than a hula hoop, because my controlling your depth without the resistance of paper is harder than it looks. "It happened to **Picasso**, too," says **Forsblom**, because if you look closely at his old photo series, you'll see that toward the end of his sketches, even he lost reference of what he was drawing in midair.

Which brings us to the ultimate question: What will **Forsblom** do with this tech, if even **Picasso** couldn't master it? A few things, he tells me. First, [you can sign up](#) to try **Air Pencil** in a closed beta. You'll be part of a feedback community that's testing the tech and hopefully making cool things with it. Second, you'll be able to license **Air Pencil**'s core technology to add to apps. **Forsblom** imagines there will be free and pay options: basically, you only have to pay for the tech if you intend to profit off of it. And third, there's the great unknown level of what could be done with a smartphone-based 3-D sketch tool. What if you shared 3-D sketches through messaging applications like **Facebook** Messenger or **WeChat**? What if you could draw something and have it 3-D printed? What if you could put on an Oculus Rift headset, grab your smartphone, and watch yourself draw in 3-D space? They're all possibilities, **Forsblom** says, but it's unclear what he plans to build, and what he'd prefer the development community build.

In the meantime, head to [this link](#), and maybe you can try your own hand at being **Picasso**.

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