

Marrying Architecture and Visual Effects

An Interview with Keely Colcleugh,
Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Kilograph

EDITORS' NOTE Keely Colcleugh is an entrepreneur and designer with over 18 years of experience in the fields of architecture, graphic design, film, visualization, and animation. Colcleugh has worked with leading architecture and design practices around the world and has also worked as a previsualization and visual effects artist for feature films such as Iron Man and Superman Returns. In addition to professional pursuits, she



Keely Colcleugh

has lectured on the topic of architectural visualization at the University of Southern California, California Polytechnic Institute, the University of Kentucky, and the Instituto di Architecture di Venezia. Colcleugh is a board member at the A+D Museum in Los Angeles, the Vice President of the American Society of Architectural Illustrators, and a member of the Jury for the Architizer A+ Awards. She holds a bachelor of architecture degree from McGill University and a master's degree from the Southern California Institute of Architecture.

COMPANY BRIEF Kilograph (kilograph.com) is a creative collective of architects, game developers and 3D artists based in Los Angeles. Through experiments in narrative, movement, and aesthetics, Kilograph is cracking the code on how to make viewers deeply engage with a design. Their digital experiences have helped people and companies like Gensler, Nike, Zaha Hadid Architects, and Ford tell visual stories on-screen, online, and out in the world. Kilograph is a certified WBE, SBE, LSBE with the state of California, County of Los Angeles, and Metro.

Will you discuss the history and heritage of Kilograph and the vision you had for creating the company?

I was an architect and I have always been interested in the visual storytelling aspect of architectural design.

My love of storytelling led me to Los Angeles where I talked my way into a visual effects firm. We were a previsualization house, so my tasks included a combination of animation, visual set building and layout design in 3D for major movies.

Eventually I realized that the architectural world could use what visual effects artists were doing every day, and I funneled this vision into Kilograph.

Are the services Kilograph offers well understood and are there direct competitors in the field?

Architectural visualization and real estate marketing are known commodities at this point; what we're doing is helping companies blur the boundaries between the two, with a focus on creative applications that delight people.

We're certainly one of the few companies I know of that is experimenting with technology at a high level in our markets. We are constantly

convincing clients to try virtual reality and augmented reality, since they are some of the best ways to tell a unique story about a space.

How do you define the client profile for Kilograph and where do you see the greatest opportunities for growth?

Right now, we're focused pretty squarely on real estate development. As larger companies delve into the urban environment, we are uniquely positioned to help them realize their goals. For example: the recent "City of Tomorrow" project we did with Ford.

Initiatives relating to smart cities, urban design and the development of streets with autonomous vehicles has been a great place for us to expand. We have recently been dealing more with transit and technology.

There is a huge opportunity for companies that understand the power of augmented and virtual reality. As we continue to experiment, we can provide intriguing solutions for anything that touches a built environment or city.

Is the primary focus on the U.S. market or is Kilograph focused globally?

Primarily the U.S., as the economy has been so strong here. However, we work with global clients all the time, including work in Asia and the Middle East. We're also growing our European offerings through a small office in Spain.

As you have built out your team, have you primarily looked for those with an architectural background or do you also look for other skill sets?

An architectural background is incredibly helpful, not just for the skills those people possess; it's the thinking we really value.

There is a terrific problem-solving mentality that comes from folks who have architecture degrees.

However, we also employ game developers, graphic designers, coders, VR technicians and visual effects artists so we can provide creative answers to common problems.

How critical is it to put metrics in place to show the impact of Kilograph's work and are metrics challenging in this area?

Metrics aren't challenging today, but it depends on the metric you're looking for. It was certainly more challenging early on before we had the data.

It's easier to collect better data today. For instance, if someone wanted to see if a project that used virtual reality sells faster than one that didn't, that information is readily available. Previously, there wasn't much of a difference in how properties were marketed, especially in Los Angeles, so marketing with our type of a product is a relatively new phenomenon that finally allows us to get some good data.

Even though Kilograph is a leader in the utilization of technology, how challenging is it to stay on top of technology given the speed of change?

All of us really love it and are, without exception, deeply interested in tech. That's why I got into it and why our engineering department is into it, so it's not a chore for us. Because tech is changing so frequently, you have to be willing to step into the unknown. Learning how to bridge the divide between experimentation and finding clear uses for our clients is part of the fun though.

For young people interested in becoming architects, is there still value in putting pen to paper and learning how to draw or will technology replace this need?

In 2019, I will be the president of ASAI – the American Society of Architectural Illustrators. We're a group of illustrators focusing on the built environment using any medium. The founding members were all watercolorists and sketch artists and many of the artists in the organization still do that. We believe there is a long history behind that kind of manual illustration and that it is still really important to how things get developed.

Did you have an entrepreneurial spirit early on and the desire to build your own company?

I did. I had some advisors over the years who I have known since I was very young, and they said this always seemed like something I was going to do. ●