WILLIAM MICHAEL McHUGH

A Creative Life & Career

Executive Career Profile

FIVE DECADES AT THE INTERSECTION OF

STORYTELLING • DESIGN • PROBLEM SOLVING & VALUE ENGINEERING

TECHNOLOGY • BUSINESS • EXPERIENCE

CAREER ARCHIVE EDITION

Prepared September 2026

Prepared from the documented career archive maintained by William Michael McHugh and associated project sites.

EXECUTIVE PROFILE

A career defined by integration

William Michael McHugh is a multidisciplinary creative and technical concept developer whose career spans approximately five decades across themed entertainment, film and animation, computer games, museums, visitor attractions, interactive media, public-space design, fine art, product development, immersive technology, virtual environments, environmental initiatives, and large-scale destination concepts.

The consistent thread is not a single medium or job title. It is the ability to take an idea from an early narrative, sketch, or problem statement and develop it into something a professional team can evaluate, budget, engineer, fabricate, build, operate, or advance. Across the career archive, McHugh repeatedly works at the boundary between creative intent and practical implementation.

CORE PROFESSIONAL THROUGHLINE

Story → concept → visualization → budgeting → team formation → engineering coordination → fabrication → installation → guest experience.

Career at a glance

1970s–early 1980s	Traditional art, painting, printmaking, fabrication, museum exhibits, interiors, commercial design and hands-on production.
1980s	Animation, character/environment design, film effects and major themed-entertainment work, including Universal Studios.
Late 1980s–1990s	Ride & Show Engineering, international attractions, theme-park planning, interactive media, computer games and original IP.
2000s–2010s	Independent creative/technical development, real-time attractions, interpretive projects, digital aquariums and Virtual Production Studio methods.
2016–2020	Flexible LED systems, immersive domes and spheres, Dubai/Al Wasl studies, museum and visitor-center development, immersive environments.
2020–present	AI-assisted development, environmental robotics, virtual destinations, new IP, destination development, ROVESTER and the Pavilion/OMSI concept.

The central distinction

McHugh's archive reads less like the résumé of a specialist and more like the record of a creative developer who repeatedly learns the next tool required by the idea. Traditional drawing and fabrication led to entertainment design; entertainment design led to interactive systems and computer graphics; computer graphics led to real-time virtual prototyping; immersive media led to LED environments, robotics, AI-assisted visualization, and systems-level concept development.

CHAPTER I

Foundations: art, making, and the built environment

McHugh's professional foundation was physical. His early career developed through painting, printmaking, exhibit work, interiors, fabrication, leather work, silk screening, stone lithography, and production-studio practice. That experience established a habit that remains visible throughout his later work: creative ideas are considered in relation to materials, scale, labor, construction, cost, and the people who must actually make them.

By the early 1980s he was applying that thinking to substantial commercial environments. Work associated with A. Carroll Design Studios included three-dimensional design development for the Marketplace shopping center in the Orlando area, including the signature clock tower, storefront systems, and on-site coordination translating design intent into construction across multiple tenants.

Film, animation, and character development

During the first half of the 1980s, McHugh expanded into entertainment production. His documented work includes background design for DIC's Pole Position, creature and sculptural work for film makeup effects, product and toy concepts, and a period at Hanna-Barbera Productions as a senior designer/team director. His archive credits him with character and environmental design associated with approximately sixty episodes of GoBots and work on the Rock Lords feature production.

This period added storytelling, character, action, and audience point-of-view to an already practical design vocabulary. Those elements would soon converge in themed entertainment.

Universal Studios: a pivotal professional chapter

At Universal Studios Hollywood, McHugh worked as a show designer and art director on the Miami Vice Action Spectacular. His role extended from treatment and stunt/action concepts into environmental design, landscape direction, coordination with architects and structural engineers, specialty vendors, show-action equipment, and field installation. The experience placed him directly inside the process of converting entertainment storytelling into a complex, functioning live attraction.

For Universal Studios Florida, the career archive documents significant creative-development involvement in several foundational attractions. On E.T. Adventure, McHugh served in a lead show-design/art-direction capacity, coordinating storyboard artists, set and ride-layout designers, illustrators, sculptors, character designers, model makers, architects, effects suppliers, lighting and sound teams, animated-figure vendors, and the ride manufacturer. The archive also records development contributions connected with Jaws, King Kong, Animal Actors, Hanna-Barbera, and a large central-lagoon stunt-show concept.

> The Universal years established a working model that would repeat throughout the career: narrative, spatial design, mechanical reality, engineering, budget, fabrication, installation, and the final audience experience must all connect.

What this period established

- An ability to direct and coordinate multidisciplinary creative teams rather than operate only as an individual artist.
- Comfort working with architects, engineers, ride manufacturers, specialty fabricators, effects teams, and field crews.
- A practical understanding of attraction development from concept through installation and operations-facing decisions.

CHAPTER II

International attractions, Ride & Show, and interactive media

After and alongside Universal, McHugh developed a long professional relationship with Ride & Show Engineering and associated companies. Over roughly three decades he served at various times as Director of Show Production, Senior Show Designer, Creative Producer, consultant, and business-development collaborator. The work expanded his experience from individual attractions into international museums, entertainment projects, master plans, ride systems, and show-production environments.

His archive documents work connected with the Hong Kong Museum of Science, major development studies in Taiwan, theme-park and attraction work in Japan, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and the United States, as well as dark rides, live shows, interactive systems, and location-based entertainment concepts. The recurring role was often that of translator: turning a creative idea into information that engineers, estimators, vendors, and owners could act upon.

Sequoia Creative and large-scale concept development

Around 1990, McHugh served as Director of Show Design at Sequoia Creative, directing entertainment concepts through scripts, storyboards, layouts, illustrations, and preliminary budgets. The work reinforced his ability to think at multiple scales—from individual show moments to destination planning and attraction portfolios.

Computer games: moving from physical worlds to interactive worlds

From roughly 1991–93, McHugh worked at Dynamix in computer-game development. His documented responsibilities included art direction, production planning, budgeting and scheduling, storyboarding, character and scene development, film/video production, and computer graphics. Projects referenced across his archive include Betrayal at Krondor, Star Siege, Pro Pilot, and related interactive concepts.

The move into games was consequential. The logic of the themed attraction—designed environment, point-of-view, story progression, interaction, spatial navigation—could now be tested in a digital world. This became an early bridge to the real-time visualization methods that would define much of his later work.

Original intellectual property

During the same era, McHugh created Tiny Monsters, an original character property comprising more than twenty hand-drawn and written characters. Decades later, he returned to the IP using contemporary 3D and AI-assisted workflows, demonstrating another recurring behavior in the career: ideas are treated as living assets that can be revisited when new technology makes a different form of expression possible.

Entrepreneurial operating model

From the 1990s forward, McHugh increasingly worked through his own entities and collaborative ventures. The portfolio expands into architectural visualization, themed pools, retail, museum concepts, sports entertainment, simulator concepts, interactive attractions, public art, software-driven experiences, and independent development studies. Rather than separating creative work from commercial reality, his process consistently considers the client, vendor network, budget, schedule, technical solution, and potential business model together.

CHAPTER III

From physical fabrication to real-time virtual production

McHugh did not abandon physical making as his work became increasingly digital. In 2000, he and his wife Tricia established Solari Glass in Florence, Oregon, creating and manufacturing handmade glass artwork. The continuing presence of craftsmanship alongside software and visualization is central to understanding the career: the digital tools are extensions of a maker's approach, not substitutes for it.

Interactive ride systems and digital environments

By the early 2000s, McHugh was combining computer graphics, software, and physical ride systems. His archive describes producing and directing real-time interactive ride projects for Ride & Show Engineering, including graphics, show-system development, and motion-control software coordination. Later concepts expanded into digital aquariums, motion-base attractions, interactive exhibit packages, stereoscopic theaters, and museum environments.

Kahramaa Awareness Park and a new collaborative method

From 2012–14, McHugh returned to R&S Production Services as Creative Producer/Show Designer on the Kahramaa Awareness Park project in Doha, Qatar. His role included co-development of the Qatora water-cycle dark ride, script and action development, show design, art direction, vendor coordination, and animation supervision. The project also became an important proving ground for his developing Virtual Production Studio methodology.

The Virtual Production Studio

McHugh's real-time workflow treats a virtual environment as a working development laboratory. Instead of relying only on drawings and static renderings, a project can be constructed at low cost as an explorable world. Scale, sequence, sightlines, exhibits, operations, circulation, storytelling, and alternative design decisions can be experienced and revised before the team commits to more expensive CAD, engineering, fabrication, or construction.

RAPID EXPERIENTIAL PROTOTYPING

Build the experience early. Walk it. Test it. Show it to the team. Revise it before the expensive disciplines are fully committed.

This approach became a bridge between traditional show design, game-engine thinking, architectural visualization, and collaborative project development.

Oregon, community, and interpretive work

A parallel stream of work connects the career to Oregon communities and visitor interpretation. Projects include interpretive media and infrastructure work for Sea Lion Caves; NaviFUN, a visual and 360-degree exploration of Florence and the Oregon coast; large-format mural and building-wrap projects rooted in local history; and concept studies for visitor centers, waterfront development, and regional destination projects.

The McKenzie River Discovery Center is a particularly clear example of themed-entertainment methods applied to educational and civic work. McHugh used his virtual-production workflow to test facility relationships, exhibit programming, narrative, visitor experience, and budget-conscious development before conventional implementation.

CHAPTER IV

Immersive LED, virtual destinations, and technology-led concepts

Beginning around 2016, McHugh focused increasingly on flexible LED technology and its potential to transform immersive theaters. Through FlexTek-Media he developed dome, semi-dome, globe, sphere, panoramic-theater, simulator, and interactive-display concepts. His studies rarely treated the screen as an isolated product; they integrated display technology with architecture, ride systems, motion bases, guest throughput, sound, content, operating logic, and revenue potential.

Al Wasl / Dubai Expo 2020 concept study

One of the most ambitious self-initiated studies was a concept for the Al Wasl environment associated with Dubai Expo 2020. McHugh developed a near-spherical LED immersion idea incorporating a large motion-base experience, global real-time connectivity, 3D development, capacity thinking, budgets, imagery, and a proposed specialist team. The project illustrates a recurring pattern in his career: emerging technology is treated as a starting point for a complete experience and business proposition, not simply as hardware.

LED research and physical prototyping

The FlexTek-Media archive also documents work with LED manufacturers on physical dome tests and other practical investigations. The purpose of the studies was to determine what flexible LED could enable in museums, visitor attractions, training environments, public installations, simulators, and compact entertainment venues as pixel pitch, curvature, brightness, control systems, and cost improved.

Immersion Island

Around 2020, McHugh expanded long-running OpenSimulator experimentation into Immersion Island, a persistent virtual destination combining entertainment, exhibitions, trade shows, art, commerce, live performance, social interaction, and exploratory environments. The project preceded much of the current mainstream discussion of the metaverse and reflects more than a decade of sustained interest in persistent virtual worlds as development and experience platforms.

A continuing pattern: technology in service of experience

Across these projects, technology is rarely the final subject. McHugh uses technology to create a new form of encounter: to make an audience feel present, to make a complex subject understandable, to prototype an attraction, to connect remote people, to test a business model, or to make an otherwise expensive idea visible enough for a team to discuss intelligently.

CHAPTER V

Recent work: environmental systems, destination development, and the Pavilion

During the 2020s, McHugh's work has expanded from individual attractions toward larger systems that combine technology, education, economics, environment, workforce, and place-making. The same development process remains visible, but the canvas is larger.

ROVESTER / ROV Sea Urchin Harvestor

ROVESTER applies robotics, remote operations, marine science, workforce training, and commercial development to the problem of destructive sea-urchin populations and kelp-forest restoration. The concept combines equipment, harvesting strategy, processing, training, research, partnership structures, and a potential business model. It is representative of McHugh's recent shift toward projects in which an experience-design mindset is used to organize a complex real-world system.

RiverTown and destination-scale thinking

RiverTown and related land-development studies extend the process to hundreds of acres, exploring combinations of entertainment, education, film/media production, technology, housing, aquaculture, tourism, and destination uses. The design problem is no longer a single attraction; it is how multiple uses reinforce each other economically and experientially.

The Technology, Health & Science Pavilion

The current Technology, Health & Science Pavilion concept for Portland's OMSI District is a synthesis of the career. Conceived as a roughly 150,000-square-foot experiential venue within the broader 24-acre district context, the Pavilion brings together immersive media, emerging technology, AI, robotics, health and human performance, ocean exploration, advanced manufacturing, sustainability, research partnerships, public events, workforce development, and destination economics.

The Pavilion is presented in McHugh's archive as a self-initiated, non-commissioned concept rather than an existing OMSI commission. That distinction is important because it reflects the working method behind many of his most ambitious projects: identify an opportunity, build enough of the idea to make it visible and discussable, validate it through specialists, develop the team and business logic, and then seek the partnerships required to move toward reality.

> THE PAVILION AS A CAREER SYNTHESIS
>
> **A project where storytelling, experiential design, science communication, immersive technology, real-time visualization, engineering coordination, business development, partnership formation, and district-scale thinking converge in one concept.**

AI as another tool in the continuum

McHugh's recent use of AI fits the larger career pattern. The technology is used to accelerate visualization, storyboard ideas, explore alternatives, revisit archived concepts, and communicate complex projects more quickly. It does not replace the older skills; it joins drawing, model making, computer graphics, OpenSimulator, SketchUp, game-engine tools, compositing, and hands-on fabrication as another instrument in a long-running development process.

PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

Core capabilities and working identity

The breadth of the archive makes conventional titles incomplete. The strongest description is multidisciplinary creative and technical concept developer: a professional who can originate an idea, make it visible, build a development framework around it, and organize the specialists required to validate and advance it.

Creative Development	Treatments, scripts, narratives, story concepts, attraction concepts, environmental storytelling, original IP, show development, and experience strategy.
Art Direction & Design	Character and environment design, spatial concept development, illustration direction, set and show design, visual language, and creative-team leadership.
Technical Translation	Working between creative teams, architects, engineers, ride manufacturers, software teams, specialty vendors, fabricators, and field crews.
Rapid Prototyping	Real-time virtual worlds, 3D visualization, walkthrough development, spatial testing, iterative presentation, and early-stage digital-twin thinking.
Production & Implementation	Budgets, schedules, vendor coordination, preliminary estimating, fabrication awareness, installation support, and operational considerations.
Emerging Technology	Interactive media, motion systems, LED environments, VR/AR/MR, game-engine workflows, remote operations, robotics concepts, AI-assisted development, and immersive display systems.
Business & Venture Development	Independent concept creation, team assembly, partner outreach, business-model exploration, destination planning, and early-stage investment narratives.
Public & Educational Experience	Museums, interpretive environments, science communication, visitor centers, community storytelling, environmental initiatives, and workforce-development concepts.

How McHugh tends to work

- Start with the story, problem, opportunity, or guest experience rather than the tool.
- Make the idea visible early enough that other disciplines can react to something concrete.
- Bring seasoned specialists into the process when the concept reaches questions that require deeper technical validation.
- Move repeatedly between creative ambition and practical constraints: budget, structure, technology, schedule, operations, throughput, fabrication, and market.
- Use prototypes and visualization to expose problems before they become expensive.
- Treat collaborators as part of the concept-development process rather than as downstream vendors.

Professional network and team formation

A less visible but important career asset is a long-standing network of experienced professionals across multiple disciplines. The archive repeatedly shows McHugh assembling architects, engineers, producers, designers, programmers, fabricators, manufacturers, operators, researchers, and business partners—and knowing when another discipline needs to enter the room.

SELECTED CAREER RECORD

Representative projects, roles, and domains

The following selection is not intended as a complete project list. It shows the range of environments in which the same underlying creative-development skills have been applied.

PROJECT / PLATFORM	REPRESENTATIVE ROLE	DOMAIN
Marketplace / Orlando	3D design development; storefront and signature-element design; on-site coordination	Commercial architecture / retail
Hanna-Barbera / GoBots	Senior design / team direction; character and environment design	Animation / character design
Miami Vice Action Spectacular	Show design; art direction; action concepts; multidisciplinary coordination	Live themed entertainment
E.T. Adventure / Universal Studios Florida	Lead show-design and art-direction responsibilities; team and vendor coordination	Dark ride / major attraction
Jaws, King Kong, Animal Actors, Hanna-Barbera development	Creative development and design contributions	Themed entertainment
Ride & Show Engineering projects	Director / senior designer / creative producer / consultant roles	International attractions / museums / rides
Dynamix	Art direction; production planning; interactive-content development	Computer games / interactive media
Tiny Monsters	Original creator; character IP; later 3D and AI-assisted redevelopment	Original IP / publishing / collectibles
Solari Glass	Co-founder; handmade art-glass development and production	Art / craft / manufacturing
Ocean Adventure concepts	Interactive exhibits, theaters, motion-base and digital-aquarium development	Museums / entertainment
Kahramaa Awareness Park	Creative Producer / Show Designer; Qatora ride development	Educational attraction / Middle East
Virtual Production Studio	Founder/developer of real-time prototyping methodology	Visualization / collaborative development
NaviFUN / Oregon projects	Producer / creative developer / regional interpretation	Tourism / community / digital media
FlexTek-Media / LED concepts	Creative and technical development of immersive display applications	LED / domes / simulators / immersive media
Al Wasl concept study	Self-initiated immersive attraction development	Expo / large-scale immersive experience
Immersion Island	Persistent virtual environment / destination concept	Virtual worlds / events / commerce
ROVESTER	Concept development integrating marine robotics, training, ecology, and business	Environmental technology / robotics
Technology, Health & Science Pavilion	Self-initiated concept; experience, technology, business and partnership development	Science / innovation / destination development

PERSPECTIVE

What the career represents

The most useful way to understand William Michael McHugh's career is not as a sequence of disconnected industries but as a continuous expansion of the same core practice. A traditional artist learned fabrication. A fabricator learned entertainment production. A show designer learned to work with engineers and ride systems. An attraction developer moved into interactive software and computer graphics. Digital tools evolved into real-time worlds. Real-time worlds became a development method. Immersive technology, robotics, environmental systems, AI, and district-scale projects followed.

The tools changed repeatedly; the underlying question did not: How can an idea be made visible, understandable, testable, and practical enough for other people to help make it real?

> **McHugh's career is best described as the work of a creative developer who operates between imagination and implementation.**

That identity also explains the unusually wide range of subject matter in the archive. The work is not united by industry. It is united by process: curiosity, visualization, collaboration, practical development, and a persistent willingness to ask "what if?" and then do enough work to discover whether the answer might be "this could actually work."

The current Pavilion and ROVESTER work are therefore not departures from the earlier career. They are logical extensions of it. They combine the artistic instincts of the early studio years, the team-and-production discipline of Universal and Ride & Show, the interactive logic of computer games, the visualization methods of the Virtual Production Studio, the technology experimentation of FlexTek-Media, and decades of independent entrepreneurial development.

Working description

WILLIAM MICHAEL McHUGH

Multidisciplinary creative and technical concept developer working at the intersection of storytelling, design, engineering, technology, experience, and business.

Archive note

This document is an executive synthesis of McHugh's publicly maintained career archive and associated project sites. It is intended to explain the shape and continuity of the career, not to replace detailed project credits, contracts, production records, or the underlying résumé. Project descriptions distinguish completed professional work from self-initiated concept development where that distinction is material.

PRIMARY CAREER ARCHIVE

williammichaelmchugh.weebly.com

ASSOCIATED PROJECT ARCHIVES REVIEWED

Virtual Production Studio
FlexTek-Media
Immersion Island
NaviFUN
Solari Glass
My Fun Projects

And there is much more.