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IMT&S RESEARCH REPORT

GAME DEMO FOR GALEA CREATIONS

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Abstract

This research investigates how art direction can be applied to unify the visual and narrative identity of a stylized action-adventure game when balancing client-defined guidelines with a team's creative interpretation. The project was conducted in collaboration with Galea Creations and focused on the development of a vertical slice for *Azure Alpha*, a mythologically inspired jungle world populated by original creatures and environments.

Using a research-through-design approach, the study translated Galea's production bible and external visual references into a structured art direction framework defining color, shape language, material treatment, scale, and visual hierarchy. These principles were applied through iterative development of three creatures, environment assets, and an environment key. The process was supported by continuous client and team feedback, ensuring alignment with stakeholder expectations while allowing creative reinterpretation.

The effectiveness of the art direction system was evaluated through a perception-based survey with twenty participants. The results confirmed clear recognition of biome, cultural influence, creature roles, and visual hierarchy, validating the coherence and readability of the visual identity.

The research demonstrates that art direction functions as both a creative and organizational system, enabling visual consistency, narrative clarity, and collaborative production under external constraints.

Introduction

Digital games rely on strong art direction to create immersive and coherent worlds. Visual cohesion between characters, environments, and narrative tone is essential for communicating atmosphere and supporting player engagement, especially in stylized games where abstraction replaces realism. As Blevins (2023) notes, art direction functions as a shared visual language that aligns creative decisions across multiple disciplines.

This project was developed in collaboration with Galea Creations as part of a team effort to produce a vertical slice of a third-person action-adventure game titled *Azure Alpha* (working title). The demo aims to showcase core gameplay, environmental storytelling, and a mythologically inspired world. Galea provided a production bible defining tone, cultural influences, and visual style, but these materials did not fully specify how the vision should be translated into a coherent visual system for a playable game.

Within this context, art direction plays a central role. As art lead and sole 2D artist, the task was to interpret the client's visual foundation and translate it into concrete designs and documentation that unify characters, creatures, and environments. This included concept art, visual studies, and the development of an internal art direction framework.

The research examines how art direction can unify visual and narrative identity while balancing client-defined guidelines with team-based creative interpretation. This is approached through visual research, iterative design, and evaluation through client and audience feedback.

The scope of this research covers the art direction and visual development of *Azure Alpha*, including concept art, environment and creature design, and the art direction document that supports future production.

This thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 presents the problem definition. Chapter 3 introduces the research questions. Chapter 4 outlines the methodology. Chapter 5 documents the development process. Chapter 6 discusses results and conclusions. Chapter 7 presents recommendations and reflection.

Use of Generative AI

This thesis was written with limited support from a generative AI text assistant. The tool was used exclusively as a writing aid to improve sentence structure, academic tone, and clarity of existing draft text. It was not used to generate research content, design decisions, analysis, or results. All concepts, interpretations, and project outcomes are the author's own.

Problem Definition

Stylized games rely on strong art direction to establish a coherent visual and narrative identity. When a project is based on an existing client concept or production bible, this becomes more complex. Visual cohesion must be maintained while allowing space for creative interpretation, and failure to balance these factors can result in inconsistent assets that weaken worldbuilding and limit reuse in later production. As noted by Murray (2023), managing the tension between client vision and team creativity is a recurring challenge in collaborative design. Art direction therefore functions not only as a creative tool but also as an organizational system that translates conceptual intent into consistent visual execution across teams.

This project is developed in collaboration with Galea Creations and aims to produce a vertical slice of a third-person action-adventure game set in a mythological, organic world. Galea provided a production bible defining the tone, atmosphere, and cultural influences of the game. However, these materials do not constitute a complete art direction system for a playable demo, requiring further interpretation and visual structuring. The project team must therefore transform these external guidelines into a unified and production-ready visual identity.

Within this context, art direction must mediate between two needs: remaining faithful to the client's vision while allowing the team to establish an internally consistent style that supports creatures, environments, and narrative tone. As Blevins (2023) argues, this balance requires clearly defined visual rules supported by documentation and feedback cycles. Without such a system, creative decisions risk becoming fragmented, reducing both clarity and production value.

The central problem addressed in this research is therefore how to develop an art direction approach that harmonizes client-defined visual guidelines with team-based creative interpretation, ensuring a unified visual and narrative identity for the *Azure Alpha* vertical slice.

Success Indicators

- The resulting concept art, environment paintovers, and art direction documentation demonstrate visual cohesion between Galea's reference material and the team's interpretation.
- Feedback from Galea Creations and the internal art team confirms that the visuals fit the intended tone while maintaining a distinct and consistent art direction.
- The documentation clearly shows how art direction principles guided adaptation, iteration, and integration of character and environment designs.

Research Question

The vertical slice of *Azure Alpha* is developed in collaboration with Galea Creations, based on their original game concept and production bible. While the client's materials provide a stylistic foundation, the team must reinterpret and expand this vision into a cohesive, playable demo. This requires balancing external visual constraints with internal creative interpretation, making art direction a central research problem.

This research investigates how art direction can function as a system for maintaining visual and narrative cohesion in such a collaborative production context.

Main Research Question

How can art direction be applied to unify the visual and narrative identity of a stylized action-adventure game when balancing client-defined guidelines with a team's creative interpretation?

Sub-Questions

SQ1 Discover

What visual and cultural strategies are used in professional stylized games and films to create cohesive mythological or fantasy worlds?

This explores how existing works solve the problem of visual coherence.

SQ2 Define

Which visual requirements must *Azure Alpha* meet in order to remain faithful to Galea Creations' production bible while allowing space for creative interpretation?

This defines what the art direction system must achieve, not just what it contains.

SQ3 Develop

How can these requirements be translated into concrete art direction rules and applied to creature and environment design?

This covers the creation of the framework and the visual prototypes.

SQ4 Deliver

How can audience perception and stakeholder feedback be used to determine whether the art direction successfully communicates a unified world identity?

This is validated through your Google Forms testing and client feedback.

Expected Contribution

This research provides a practical art direction framework for collaborative game production, showing how client-defined visual identity can be translated into a coherent and adaptable system for creatures and environments. The project delivers both a set of production-ready visuals and a documented design methodology demonstrating how art direction can guide creative interpretation without losing consistency.

Methodology

This research uses a research-through-design approach to investigate how art direction can be used to unify the visual and narrative identity of a game while balancing client-defined constraints with creative interpretation. Visual production is both the method of inquiry and the outcome of the research.

To address SQ1, professional examples of stylized game and film art direction were studied through desk research. This included analysis of Galea Creations' production bible, cultural reference material, and visual case studies such as *Avatar*, *Legends of Runeterra*, and comparable stylized fantasy games. Developer blogs, artbooks, and visual breakdowns were examined to identify how color, shape, material, and hierarchy are used to create cohesive worlds. These sources were analyzed by extracting recurring visual strategies and translating them into design principles relevant to *Azure Alpha*.

To answer SQ2, these findings were compared with Galea's references and early internal concept work. By identifying overlaps and conflicts between the client's vision and the team's interpretations, a set of visual requirements was defined. These included constraints on color usage, shape language, material treatment, scale, and cultural tone. These requirements formed the basis of the art direction framework and were validated through discussion and feedback with Galea Creations and the team.

SQ3 was addressed through iterative visual prototyping. The defined art direction rules were applied to the design of three creatures and a set of environment assets. Multiple iterations were produced and refined through feedback rounds. Data consisted of concept sketches, color studies, environment keys, and written or verbal feedback. Each iteration was evaluated by comparing the visuals against the defined art direction requirements to determine whether cohesion and narrative clarity improved.

To answer SQ4, a quantitative perception test was conducted with twenty participants. Participants viewed selected artworks and answered questions about biome, cultural influence, creature roles, scale, and visual clarity through a Google Forms survey. The results were analyzed using frequency and percentage distributions presented in charts. These results were compared against the success indicators from the problem definition to validate whether the art direction successfully communicated a unified visual and narrative identity.

Development Process

Iteration 1

– Establishing the Art Direction Framework and Visual System

Purpose

The purpose of the first iteration was to create a common visual base for the working title Azure Alpha that would guide all design and production choices made during the rest of the project. Galea Creations hadn't finished their final production bible yet at the start of the project, although they had already planned to start working on concepts and prototypes. Without a clear framework for art direction, this situation could have led to visual inconsistencies between creatures, environments, and narrative elements that Galea Creations had previously developed.

This version's main goal was to turn early client materials, cultural reference research, and professional art direction methods into a structured and ready-to-use visual system. This system had to fit with Galea's vision of the world while still being clear enough for different artists and fields to work together.

Research-Based Foundations

Professional art direction literature stresses that visual consistency in game production relies on the codification of artistic choices into definitive rules rather than vague inspiration. Blevins (2023) and Murray (2023) characterize art bibles as functional instruments that delineate color theory, form syntax, material handling, and illumination principles to ensure visual consistency during production.

These principles were utilized within the context of Azure Alpha by examining Galea's initial materials alongside cultural reference research extracted from De Oude Culture: Azië, Afrika, Zuid-Amerika (n.d.). This laid the groundwork for turning mythological and non-European visual traditions into stylized design logic instead of literal representation.

Based on this research, the project had three main requirements:

1. A controlled color and lighting hierarchy to help with mood and gameplay readability
2. A shape-language system that tells apart friendly, hostile, and mythical beings
3. A material language that ties together creatures, places, and civilizations into one world

The results were turned into a formal art-direction framework that could be used consistently throughout the project. Later, they were summed up in an art-direction document that other artists working on the project could also use.

Development of the Art Direction Framework

This iteration didn't just make a simple mood board; it also made a *visual system* that showed how Azure Alpha should look at every level. There were clear rules for how to use color, how to create silhouettes, how to treat surfaces, and how to create a visual hierarchy.

A *Level of Detail (LOD) hierarchy* was also added to show how visual complexity and contrast should be spread out among hero assets, gameplay elements, and background scenery. This made the visual system work as both a style guide and a useful production tool, helping both artists and level designers.

The framework also helped make an *internal asset inventory* that listed the types of creatures, props, and environmental elements needed for each level of importance. This made level design and production planning easier by making it clear what needed to be built, how detailed it needed to be, and why it needed to be done.

Client Feedback and Response

Following the presentation of the provisional art direction framework, feedback was collected from Galea Creations. The feedback was provided by *Marnix, Art Director at Galea Creations*, who oversaw the visual direction of the project as the client.

The feedback was documented in the form of verbal responses during the biweekly review sessions and summarized below as a transcript-style excerpt.

Marnix van Leeuwen (Art Director, Galea Creations):

"I'm very happy to see that our visions are in line with one another. You have a very clear idea of the world, and it really supports the story we want to tell. I especially like the way you've approached the creatures and the environment. The direction feels coherent and grounded in the mythology. At this stage I don't really have any major feedback or changes. This is really strong work, and I'm excited to see how you develop it further."

This feedback showed that the visual system created in Iteration 1 successfully matched Galea's tone and worldbuilding goals. Instead of asking for changes to the style, the client confirmed that the art direction framework met their needs and could be used as the basis for more work.

Response and Design Decisions

There was no need to make big changes to the core visual principles because the feedback didn't require a change in direction. The feedback, on the other hand, was used to confirm and improve the framework in three important ways:

1. Validation of the visual tone
The positive response to the mythology-driven and nature-focused direction confirmed that the controlled color palette, stylized materials, and non-human design language were appropriate for Azure Alpha's world.
2. Locking the art direction system
Since no major revisions were requested, the art direction framework, inventory of

principles, and LOD structure were formalized and treated as the authoritative visual guide for all subsequent concept and production work, and then distributed to the rest of the team for use.

3. Transition to production

With the direction approved, the project moved from exploratory visual research into concrete asset development, beginning with creature design in the next iteration.

This step of getting feedback made sure that all of the design work that came after was based on a visual system that the client had approved. This lowered the chance of having to do it again and gave the team the confidence to move forward with production.

Result of Iteration 1:

1.1 Art Direction Framework for Azure Alpha

The visual identity of Azure Alpha is based on a stylized mythological jungle world that draws on South American and Asian cultures. This is shown through non-human characters, exaggerated natural shapes, and symbolic decorations. The art direction is meant to let many artists work on the project while keeping a strong visual connection between creatures, environments, and civilizations.

The following rules turn this vision into a system that is ready for production.

1. Color and Lighting System

Azure Alpha sets the mood and hierarchy by using controlled saturation and layered color temperature.

Muted, natural colors like greens, blues, stone greys, and warm browns are used on big surfaces. Saturated colors are only used on faces, eyes, ceremonial markings, and magical or mythological things. The shadows are more blue-green, while the highlights are more yellow-orange.

This makes the world feel full of life and lush without making it look messy.

You can see this in the project's artwork, where the bodies of the creatures stay cool and desaturated, their facial features and markings are bright reds, yellows, and greens, and the environments mix soft greens and blues with warm sunlit edges.

2. Shape Language and Form Hierarchy

Shape language conveys narrative and emotional tone.

Neutral or friendly beings have organic, rounded shapes. Danger or hostility is shown by broken or sharp shapes. Mythical or ancient creatures only have heavy vertical mass and deep silhouette cuts. Environmental platforms use big, flat shapes to make it easy to read the game.

This makes a visual language that is easy to read from both far away and up close.

Companion-type creatures have smooth, flowing curves, while forest creatures and mythic beings have heavier shapes and thicker limbs. Instead of being thin or realistic, trees and logs are big and exaggerated.

3. Creature Typology System

All creatures in *Azure Alpha* are classified into three visual archetypes to prevent inconsistency.

Type A – Hybrid Beasts

Used for companion creatures, enemies, and roaming wildlife. These combine multiple animal inspirations into a single coherent form with recognizable anatomy, stylized proportions, and expressive faces.

Type B – Environmental Creatures

Used for forest entities and stone or plant beings. These visually merge with the environment through stone, moss, bark, or roots integrated into their bodies, terrain-like silhouettes, and slow implied movement.

Type C – Mythological Beings

Used for god-like or legendary entities. These feature highly stylized anatomy, reduced realism, strong scale cues, and minimal real-world reference.

This typology explains why the project's three main creatures feel related while clearly occupying different narrative and functional roles.

4. Scale and Proportion Logic

Azure Alpha doesn't use the "animal but bigger" design. Proportion and visual logic are used to show scale.

Big animals have smaller head-to-body ratios, thick torsos, limbs that look like pillars, deep silhouette breaks, and wear and tear from the environment, like moss, cracks, and erosion. Smaller creatures have bigger heads, thinner arms and legs, and faces that are easier to read.

This gives mythological creatures an ancient and powerful feel without making them too big in the game.

5. Material and Surface Language

All surfaces are stylized but still real.

The stone is dull and has chipped edges. Wood is warm and has fibers in it. Moss and leaves need a little more saturation. Avoid polished or clean metal. All materials show signs of aging, growing, or breaking down.

This aligns with Galea's directive that nature should remain recognizable but exaggerated.

6. Cultural and Civilizational Design

The “Macadi” culture uses ornamentation, masks, and organic motifs.

Faces and masks are highly expressive. Shapes are layered and symbolic. Human-realistic armor and European motifs are avoided. Forms are inspired by ritual, flora, and fauna.

This is reflected in the project’s mask designs and character concepts.

LOD System (Levels of Visual Importance)

Azure Alpha uses three LOD tiers to control visual focus and production effort.

LOD 1 – Hero Assets

Includes companion creatures, mythic beings, key masks, menu backgrounds, and major landmarks. These assets have the highest contrast, strongest color accents, most surface detail, and complex silhouettes. They define the identity of the game.

LOD 2 – Gameplay Assets

Includes enemies, platforms, trees, rocks, roots, and props. These prioritize clear silhouettes, mid-range detail, controlled saturation, and strong readability to support gameplay and level design.

LOD 3 – Background Assets

Includes distant foliage, cliffs, sky, fog, and far ruins. These use low contrast, low saturation, and soft edges so they never compete with gameplay or hero elements.

This framework directly influenced the development of asset lists and aided level designers by delineating which elements necessitated heightened visual prominence and which could remain understated. Because of this, the results of the research were not only theoretical but also useful right away for planning production and developing visuals.

Changes / Lessons Learned

This iteration demonstrated that even a provisional, rapidly assembled art direction framework can effectively guide a multidisciplinary team when official documentation is still in progress. However, it also showed how important it is to keep track of different versions and organize your documentation. Once Galea delivered their finalized production bible, several elements of the provisional document needed revision to prevent parallel or outdated references from causing confusion.

Iteration 2

– Creature Design Development

2.1 Enemy Creatures: Canine Predator

Design Goal and Narrative Function

The first creature made for *Azure Alpha* was a predatory dog that would be the game's main enemy. It was meant to be the most common enemy the player would face throughout the gameplay. At this point in the production process, Galea Creations had only given general worldbuilding guidelines through the production bible. There was no clear story structure or detailed creature lore. This meant that the visual development process had to create creatures that could show their role, behavior, and cultural significance just through their design, which ties back to the narrative aspect of the research question.

Therefore, the enemy was thought of not just as a combat unit, but also as a story element that was part of the environment. Instead of existing as a roaming monster, the creature was designed as a dormant statue that transforms into a living predator when the player interacts with it. This made the enemy work as:

- a worldbuilding element
- a level-design trigger
- and a hostile gameplay unit

This concept also aligned with Galea's requirement that monsters should contribute meaningfully to the inspired mythology and gameplay rather than just exist as targets.

Cultural and Mythological Reference

The idea of the canine enemy was based on the *Itzcuintli*, a hairless dog figure from Aztec cosmology and calendar symbolism. In Mesoamerican mythology, the *Itzcuintli* is linked to death, liminality between worlds, and guidance. It is often shown as a spiritual companion that helps souls get through dangerous or transitional spaces. This connection makes the *Itzcuintli* a great choice for an enemy that can be both dormant and active in the game world.

Padilla (in *Crying for Food: The Mexican Myths of 'La Llorona' and 'The Hungry Woman'* in *Cherrie L. Moraga*) talks about how Mesoamerican mythological figures, like the *Itzcuintli*, are not just animals but also symbols of fear, survival, and spiritual consequence. These figures frequently serve as intermediaries between the corporeal and the supernatural, thereby enhancing their role in narrative contexts where peril, ritual, and metamorphosis converge.

This cultural context directly affected the creature's role in *Azure Alpha*. The statue's shape, which looks like a totem, shows that the *Itzcuintli* is both a ritual and a symbol. The fact that it turns into a hostile predator shows that it is a guardian and gatekeeper in mythology. Instead of making a generic dog enemy, the creature was based on a culturally relevant archetype that works for both environmental storytelling and gameplay mechanics.

Early drawings (Figure 7.1) looked at how this creature could live in the world before it turns hostile. The small stone statue was designed in the shape of the creature, which was represented in a more simplified form in terms of stylization. These statues would be spread out throughout the jungle, partly hidden by roots, plants, and broken buildings. One important concept illustration showed the statue under a tree branch with skulls and other ritual items on it. This signaled danger and made players want to interact with it.

[illegible]

Feedback on Initial Concepts

Marnix van Leeuwen (Art Director, Galea Creations):

"These are incredibly cool designs. I'm really blown away by the idea of the small statues. I think they would work really well inside the game scene, and I like that this design actually has a clear purpose. I can clearly see the Mayan and Aztec inspirations and how they are blended together. I honestly wouldn't have guessed that several animals were used as references because it feels so unified. The snake-like tongue and the shine on the skin give it this reptilian feeling that really fits the world. I would love to see that explored further in color."

This feedback confirmed the creature's environmental integration and the hybrid anatomy language, and it also asked for more exploration through color and variation.

Design Response and Color Exploration

The creature was improved based on this feedback by making a series of full-color versions. Four different versions (Figure 7.2) were made to see how the same basic design could work in different cultural and environmental settings.

One version represented a domesticated variant associated with the jungle tribe *Macadi*. This version featured decorative buttons placed along the creature's head, functioning as ceremonial markings that signal its affiliation with the tribe. These elements visually communicate that the creature is domesticated or tamed rather than wild.

Another version took away these decorations and showed a wild jungle version, which made it clear that it was a wild predator. Two more variations looked at color palettes for other biomes in Galea's worldbuilding including a swamp or water-influenced variant with vibrant, less organic coloration due to its fish-based diet.

At this point, the creature's head and tail protrusions, which looked like ribbons, were also refined with purpose. These parts were made to look like the raised fur or tail of a threatened animal, showing aggression and readiness to attack without just using facial expressions, which is already hostile in its idle state.

The color and texture of the surface were based on reptiles and cinematic creature design, specifically inspired by the Viperwolves from *Avatar* (Cameron, 2009), which added to the mythological and non-mammalian qualities that Galea liked.



Figure 7.2: Sheet showing four colored variants of the creature.

Feedback on Color Variations

Galea Creations was given the choice of color options.

Marnix van Leeuwen (Art Director, Galea Creations):

"Wow, these are really good. I especially like the domesticated and the untamed versions. The untamed one really lends itself well to that 'statue but actually an animal' concept."

This feedback showed that the untamed jungle version best showed how the creature fit into the environment and how it worked in the story.

Finalization of the Enemy Design

The untamed jungle version was chosen as the main enemy version based on this feedback. The final design (Figure 7.3) kept the reptilian color scheme, the idea of a ritual statue, and the aggressive silhouette language. It got rid of the Macadi decorations to make it clear that it was a hostile creature in the jungle.

This version became the official enemy creature for Azure Alpha and was used as the basis for making more and adding them to the game world.

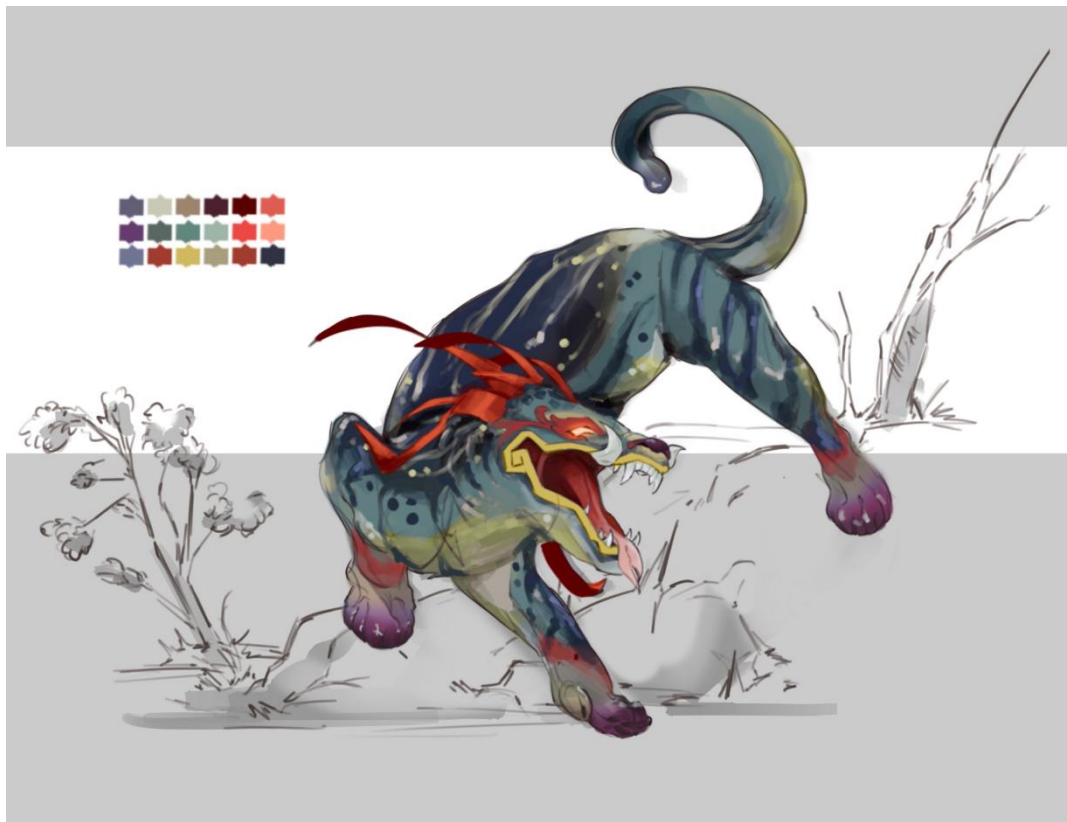


Figure 7.3: Final selected enemy design with its color palette.

2.2 Environmental Creature: Turtle Golem

Design Goal and Narrative Function

The second creature was developed as a Type B environmental being, intended to exist as part of the jungle itself rather than as a conventional enemy. The client requested a creature that could function simultaneously as wildlife, environmental storytelling, and level-design element. Its purpose was not primarily combat, but spatial control, atmosphere, and worldbuilding.

The creature was therefore conceived as a guardian of the landscape, a being whose physical form is inseparable from the rocks, moss, and terrain of the jungle. This allowed it to serve as a neutral or territorial presence that could block, reveal, or reshape player pathways within the level.

Cultural and Mythological Reference

The design was informed by the Mayan figure *Pauahtun*, a turtle- or shell-associated being that supports the heavens and symbolizes endurance, concealment, and protection (McDuffy, 1952; *The American Scholar*, n.d.). Pauahtun is traditionally depicted as a bearer of cosmic weight, a fitting metaphor for a creature designed to literally hold and shape the environment.

This mythological association guided the creature's role as a living geological structure, reinforcing its narrative function as a stabilizing and protective force within the jungle.

Concept Development

The first stage of development focused on silhouette exploration. (Figure 7.4) A series of dark mass shapes was used to test how a hard-shelled creature could read as both animal and terrain. From these, a boulder-like form emerged, leading to a golem-style body built from layered rock plates.

The second iteration refined this into a large, humanoid-shaped guardian with:

- a heavy, shell-like back
- stone limbs
- and a head embedded within the torso

Mayan architectural motifs were integrated into the rock surfaces to strengthen the cultural and symbolic connection. The creature's movement logic was inspired by gorilla-like weight and power, reinforcing its role as a massive but deliberate environmental force rather than a fast predator.

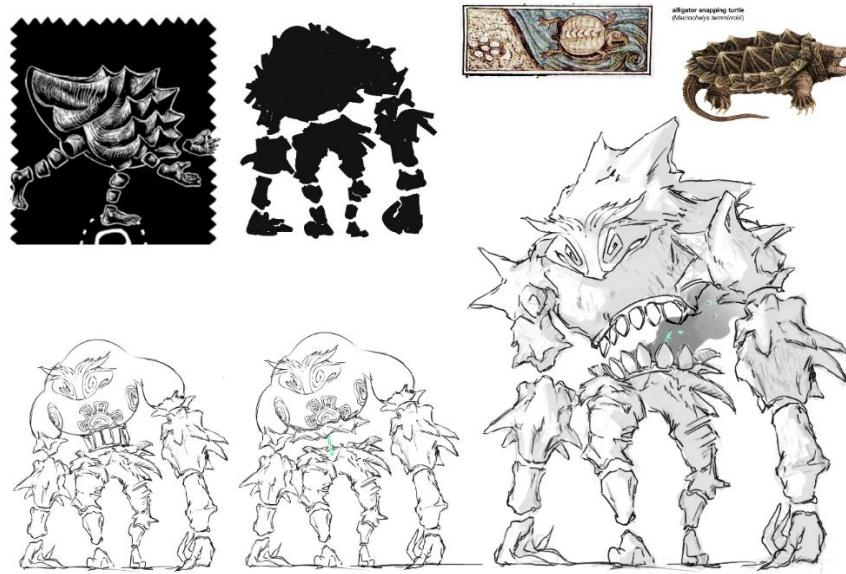


Figure 7.4: Silhouette exploration and boulder-golem development sheet.

Feedback and Evaluation

The turtle golem concept was reviewed internally and with Galea Creations. The design was consistently highlighted as one of the most visually distinctive and narratively strong creatures.

Marnix van Leeuwen (Art Director, Galea Creations):

"This creature really stands out. It feels ancient, powerful, and very much part of the world. I like how it doesn't read as just an enemy but as something that belongs to the jungle itself."

The combination of environmental integration and mythological symbolism made this creature a favorite among both the client and the team.

Production Constraints and Design Outcome

Despite the positive reception, the turtle golem was ultimately removed from the production scope due to time and resource constraints. As the project was scaled down to ensure a deliverable vertical slice, only one primary enemy type could be fully produced.

However, the turtle golem remained an important design outcome of the research and development phase. It demonstrated how cultural mythology, environmental storytelling, and creature design could be combined into a coherent system, and it informed later decisions about how creatures should interact with the landscape in *Azure Alpha*.

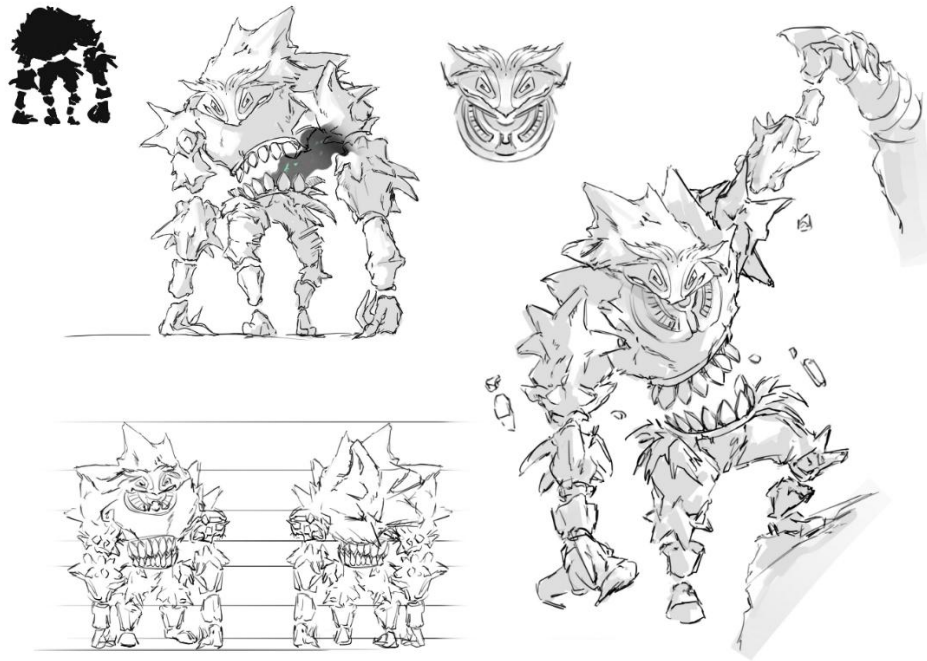


Figure 7.5: Final creature concept.

2.3 Mythological Creature

Design Goal

The final creature developed in this iteration was the project's primary mythological being. Its role was to function as a Type C creature: a symbolic, holy, and non-hostile presence that anchors the visual identity of the environment. The core challenge was to design a creature that could read as immense and powerful while remaining peaceful and ethereal, rather than aggressive or monstrous.

This requirement made the creature fundamentally different from both the enemy and the environmental golem. It had to communicate scale, divinity, and narrative importance through design alone.

Exploration and Selection

The design process began with a large set of silhouette explorations. (Figure 7.6) Over twenty silhouettes were produced to test how non-animal, non-humanoid forms could still feel coherent and monumental. These silhouettes were then refined through grayscale value studies, revealing depth, mass, and rhythm in the forms.

To reduce the design space in a structured way, the silhouettes were organized into a grid and reviewed by the team. Two designs, labeled *B7* and *C4*, were selected as the strongest candidates. Both shared a four-legged structure but avoided familiar animal anatomy, making them suitable foundations for a purely fantastical being.

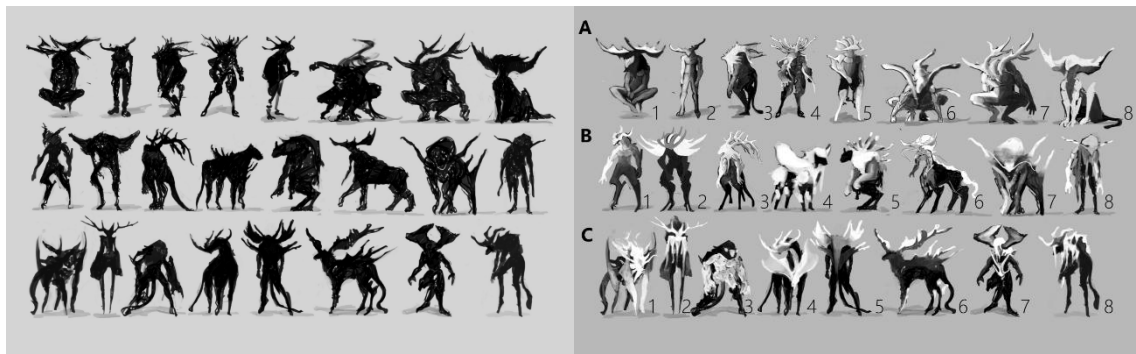


Figure 7.6: Silhouette grid with numbered selections.

Research and Form Refinement

The central research question for this creature was how to visually communicate extreme scale without relying on literal size. Reference was taken from large mythological creatures in *Legends of Runeterra*, where giant beings are defined by proportion, mass distribution, and silhouette rather than by simple scaling.



Figure 7.7: Early sketches and form exploration.

Early sketches (Figure 7.7) failed to achieve this. They used standard quadruped proportions, which made the creature appear animal-like rather than monumental. In response, the second iteration introduced:

- a heavier torso
- elevated front limbs
- and a lowered head and neck

These changes disrupted the symmetry of typical animal anatomy and created a more imposing, gravity defying presence. A size comparison with the player character was included to test scale readability.

Ear and horn variations were explored, with circular forms chosen to echo a halo, reinforcing the creature's sacred and non-hostile role.

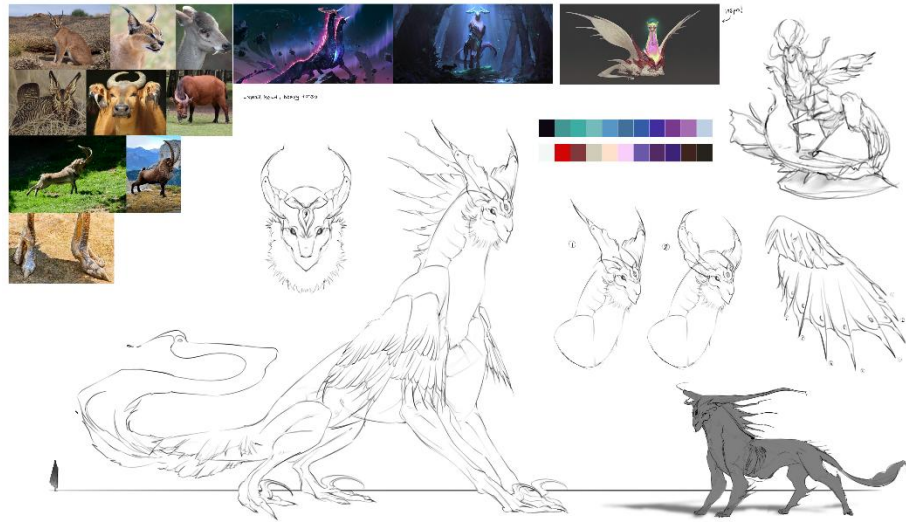


Figure 7.8: Early full-body design, scale comparison, and head variations.

Client Feedback and Design Response

The revised concept (Figure 7.8) was reviewed with Galea Creations.

Marnix van Leeuwen (Art Director, Galea Creations):

“This is a really cool design and we like the direction a lot. It might still need some work in terms of shape language. The sharp edges make it feel more threatening than it should. But once that is resolved, we are very happy with this.”

This feedback confirmed the overall direction while identifying the need to soften the silhouette to better reflect the creature's non-hostile, holy role.

In response, the design was refined by:

- reducing sharp edges
- smoothing transitions between forms
- and emphasizing flowing, fabric-like motion in the tail and neck

These changes shifted the visual language from predatory to ethereal while preserving the sense of power.

Color Development and Finalization

Color studies were produced to test how the creature could stand out without overpowering the scene. Highly saturated and glowing variants were explored but were found to strain

visual clarity, especially in combination with planned lighting effects. This led to a decision to adopt muted base colors with controlled accents, ensuring the creature remained readable and luminous without dominating the environment.

The final version (Figure 7.9) was approved after these adjustments, resulting in a design that balances monumentality, serenity, and visual harmony with the rest of the world.



Figure 7.9: Colored variants



Figure 7.10: Final selected design.

Conclusion of Iteration 2

Across the three creatures, Iteration 2 established a coherent creature ecosystem aligned with the art-direction framework. Two creatures, the enemy canine and the mythological being, were approved for production. *Front and side views* were created for both to support

the 3D modeling process, ensuring that the designs could be accurately translated into in-game assets.

Iteration 3 then moved from creatures to environmental and prop-based visual development.

Iteration 3

– Environment and Visual Development

This iteration focused on translating the previously established art direction into a functional visual language for level design, world-building, and environmental storytelling. While creature production remained the core of the project, a coherent environment was required to support those designs and to provide the design team with a usable spatial and visual framework.

Because Galea Creations had not yet provided detailed narrative or environmental history, visual development was also used to establish cultural and atmospheric cues through form, material, and color rather than explicit storytelling.

Early Visual Development and Cultural Anchoring

Initial visual development (Figure 8.1) began with exploratory character and mask designs for the Macadi, a non-human jungle tribe defined in the production bible. These designs were informed by Mesoamerican, Aztec, and Mayan visual cultures and emphasized ritualistic forms, symbolic ornamentation, and expressive facial structures. A player character concept was also developed, inspired by the plant- and insect-based races described in the production bible.

Although these character concepts were later removed from scope, they served a critical function in the early phase of environment development. They allowed the visual tone of the world to be established in terms of culture, scale, and material language before asset production began. This ensured that subsequent prop and environment designs remained grounded in a coherent fictional culture rather than purely decorative jungle scenery.

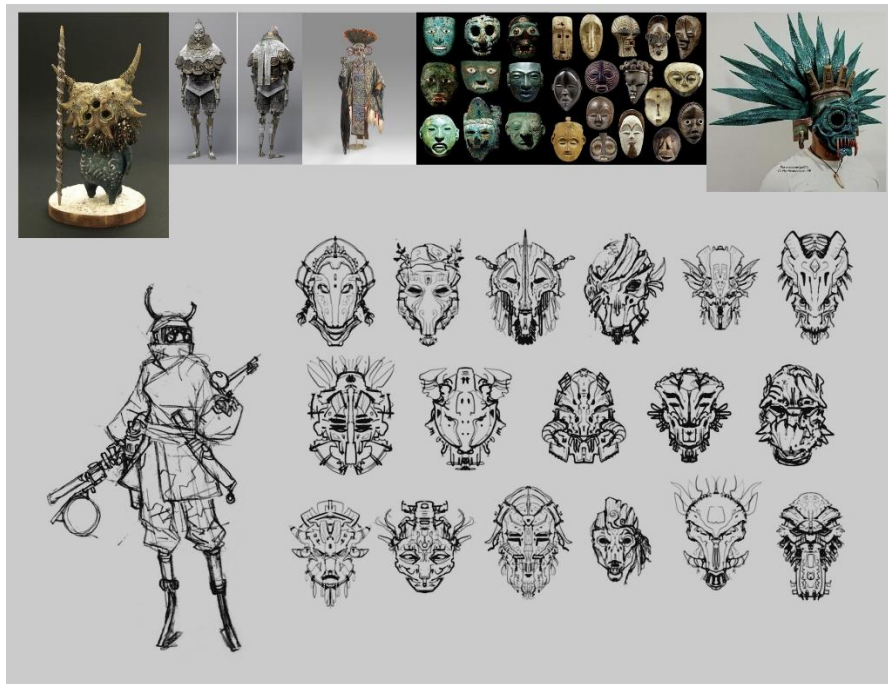


Figure 8.1: Macadi mask sheets and player character concept.

Rock and Stone Assets

The first asset group (Figure 8.2) explored was rock and stone, as these would define both terrain and platforming surfaces. To establish a stylized yet readable material language, research was conducted on hand-painted rock assets from *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2020), particularly their use of:

- chipped edges
- light-catching highlights
- cool shadow hues
- and simplified surface planes

These principles were applied to a first set of rock concepts that tested how stone could feel worn, ancient, and organic while remaining visually clean for gameplay.

Following initial feedback and self-evaluation against the art direction principles, moss and surface variation were introduced to better integrate the rocks into a deep jungle biome. These adjustments helped reduce the dryness of the stone and strengthened the sense that the rocks belonged to a living ecosystem.



Figure 8.2: Rock study sheet.

Wood, Logs, and Root Structures

Wood-based assets were developed next, beginning with logs and platform elements. (Figure 8.3) To establish a stylized wood language, rendering principles inspired by Leyendecker were used, particularly his approach to simplifying surface forms through clear value separation and directional strokes. (Leyendecker, 1920s) This allowed the wood to appear both painterly and structurally solid.

Once a base wood material language was defined, it was extended into more complex forms such as tree roots and branch-based platforms. Root designs were explored through multiple silhouettes, focusing on how they could:

- create natural pathways
- support traversal
- and visually anchor gameplay elements in the environment

These explorations ensured that roots functioned not only as decoration but as integrated level-design components.



Figure 8.3: Log and root concept sheets.

Tree and Foliage Development

Tree and foliage design focused on achieving a fantastical, mythological look without breaking visual cohesion. Early tests explored unconventional foliage colors such as pinks, blues, and reds to push the world toward a more surreal tone. While these experiments succeeded in creating a magical feel, feedback and visual testing showed that darker greens and natural browns produced a stronger sense of depth and cohesion when combined with the rest of the environment.

The final tree and foliage sheet (Figure 8.4) therefore balanced subtle stylization with more conventional jungle colors, ensuring that the environment felt lush and exotic without becoming visually distracting.



Figure 8.4: Tree color tests.

Final Asset Integration

After these separate explorations, all environment assets were reviewed together against the art direction framework. Small but consistent adjustments were made across rocks, wood, roots, and foliage, including:

- aligning hue and saturation ranges
- adding shared moss and surface wear
- and refining edge highlights

These changes ensured that the assets worked as a cohesive set rather than as isolated designs.

The resulting final sheets served as production-ready visual references and provided a consistent visual language for level designers and 3D artists. (Figure 8.5)

This iteration therefore not only produced individual assets but established a unified environment system that could be evaluated in the next phase through testing and stakeholder feedback.

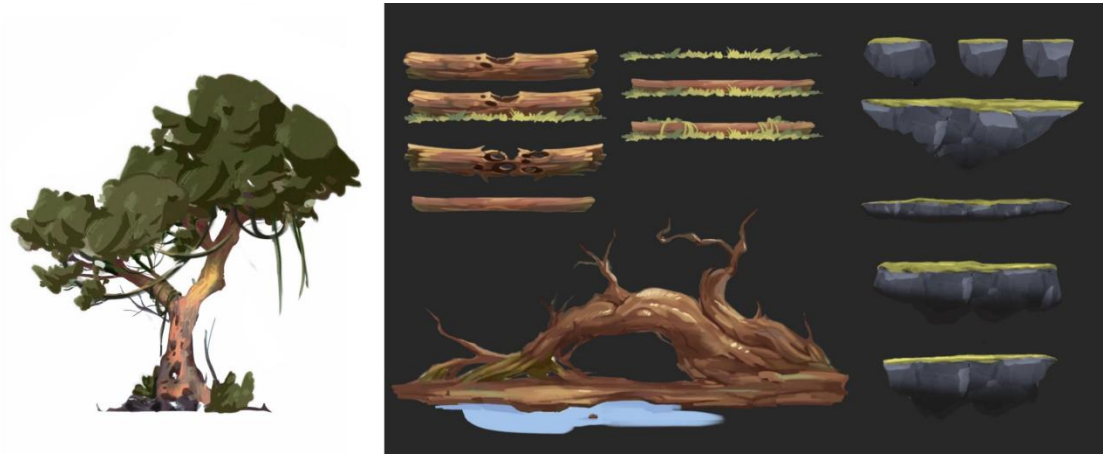


Figure 8.5: Final environmental assets sheet.

Environment Key and Composition Studies

To consolidate the environment language into a single readable image, a large environment key was developed for use as a potential menu background and visual anchor for the project. This was a deliberate art direction exercise rather than a gameplay level.

The process began with multiple composition thumbnails (Figure 8.6) testing focal points, horizon placement, and the balance between natural and architectural elements. Early versions (Figure 8.8) explored concepts such as an empty turtle-golem husk resting on a hill, but this was later replaced with stone totems and temple-like structures to better reflect the mythological and cultural tone of Azure Alpha.



Figure 8.6: Composition thumbnails and early scene sketches.

Color keys (Figure 8.7) were then created to test different lighting moods and atmospheric conditions. These explored variations in time of day, saturation, and environmental depth in order to find a palette that best supported the jungle-mythology identity.

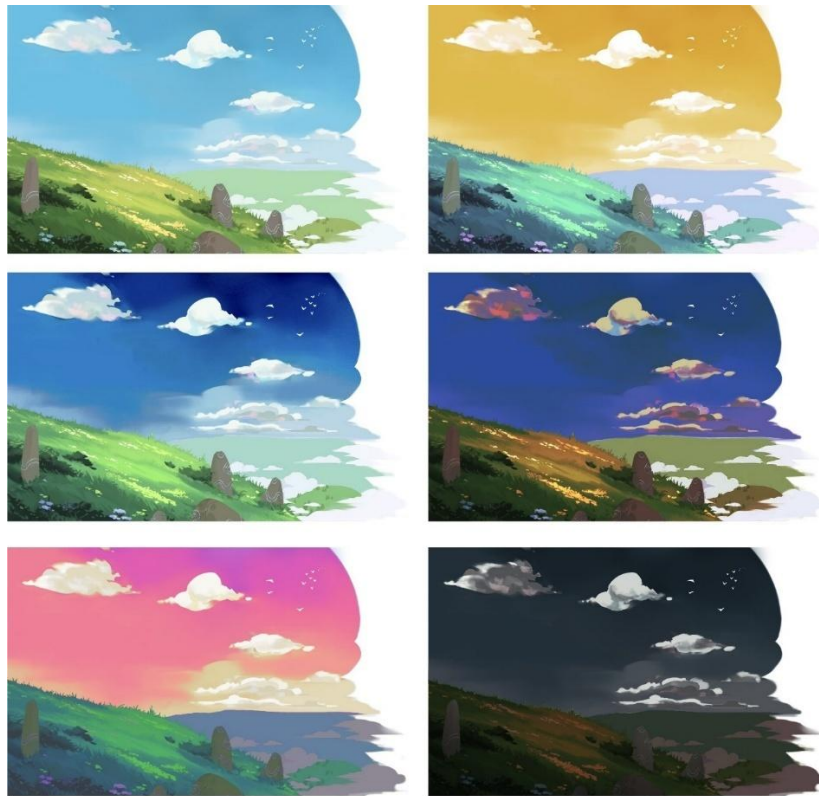


Figure 8.7: Color key sheet.



Figure 8.8: Early environment key concept.

Stakeholder Feedback and Revision

Feedback from Galea Creations on the first full environment key highlighted two main issues:

“It feels very Ghibli, which is nice, but not necessarily fitting with the theme. It feels more like plains, when it should be jungle-like and with temple elements. It might work better if there is more jungle in the distance and more trees and structures. It is absolutely beautiful.”

This feedback identified a tonal mismatch rather than a quality issue. The scene was therefore revised by:

- Replacing open meadow areas with dense jungle canopies in the distance
- Increasing the presence of stone, ruins, and totem-like forms in the foreground
- Darkening and cooling parts of the palette to reduce the soft, pastoral feel

These changes (Figure 8.9) aligned the environment key more closely with the mythological jungle tone defined in the art direction framework while preserving the clarity and composition of the original image.



Figure 8.9: Environment key with changes in comparison



Figure 8.10: Final environment key

Outcome

This iteration produced a functional environment language that supported level design, asset production, and art direction simultaneously. The combination of asset sheets, color studies, and a finalized environment key gave Galea Creations and the internal team a clear visual reference for how Azure Alpha's jungle world should look, feel, and be constructed, even in the absence of a fully defined narrative.

This concluded the visual development phase of the project and provided the necessary foundation for final production and integration.

Summary of the Development Process

The development of *Azure Alpha* progressed through a structured sequence of research, application, and validation. The process began with the creation of an art direction framework that translated client vision and cultural research into concrete visual rules. This framework established a shared language for color, form, material, and hierarchy.

Creature design then tested these rules in practice, applying them to enemies, environmental beings, and mythological figures. Client feedback during this phase confirmed the coherence and narrative clarity of the direction.

Finally, environment and visual development extended the same framework to the game world through props, terrain, and the environment key. Revisions based on stakeholder feedback ensured that tone and atmosphere remained aligned with the intended identity.

Together, these stages demonstrate a development process in which research, design, and feedback were continuously integrated to produce a cohesive and production-ready visual system.

Testing

Test Setup

To evaluate whether the art direction framework successfully communicated the intended visual and narrative identity of *Azure Alpha*, a quantitative perception test was conducted. The test was designed to measure how independent viewers interpreted the environment, creatures, and cultural cues without being given prior context.

20 participants took part in the test. The group included individuals from different age groups, occupations, and educational backgrounds. None of the participants were selected based on artistic training or familiarity with game art, allowing the results to reflect general audience perception rather than expert interpretation.

The test was distributed using Google Forms. Participants were shown selected concept art from the project, including:

- the three main creatures
- environment asset sheets
- and the environment key artwork

They were then asked a combination of multiple-choice and five-point Likert scale questions. These questions were directly derived from the art direction framework, testing whether viewers could correctly identify biome, culture, creature roles, scale, and visual hierarchy.

The results were automatically visualized in the form of bar charts and pie charts, which are presented below each relevant subsection.

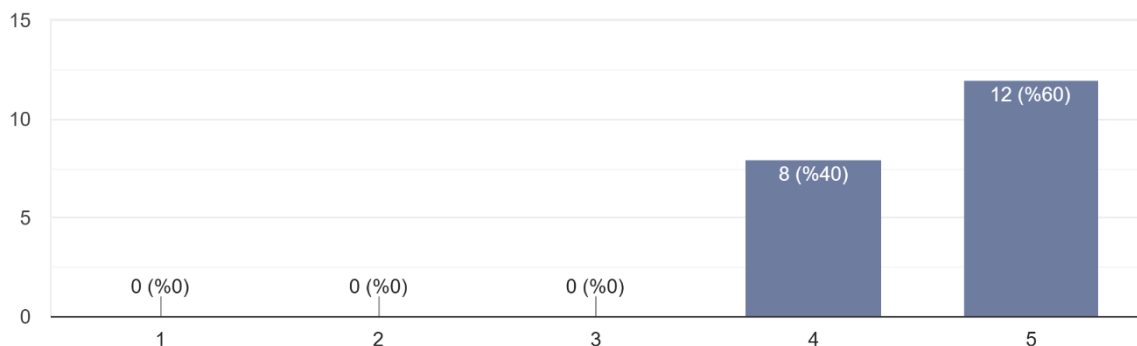
1.1 Testing Results and Analysis

Biome and World Recognition

The first test measured whether the environment assets and scene key were perceived as belonging to a jungle biome. As shown in *Figure 9.1*, all 20 participants rated this statement positively, with 60 percent selecting “strongly agree” and 40 percent selecting “agree.” This indicates that the environment clearly communicated a jungle setting without ambiguity.

The assets look like they belong to a jungle environment.

20 yanıt



Insert Figure 9.1:

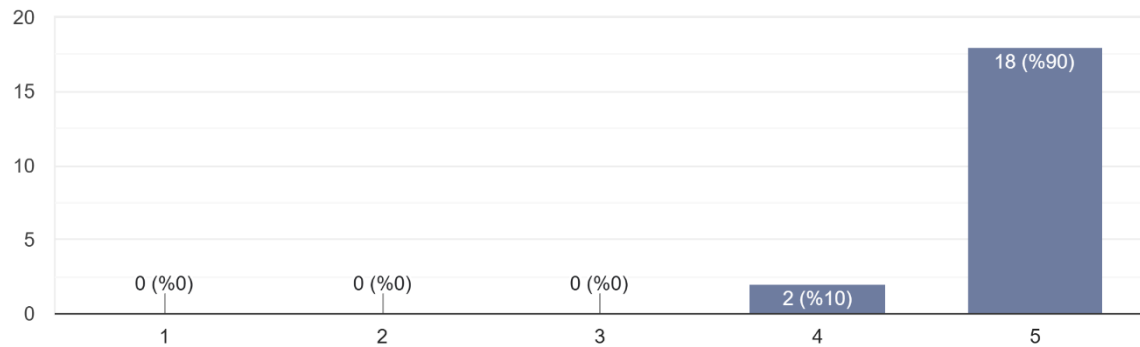
This result confirms that the art direction rules for foliage density, color temperature, and material treatment successfully conveyed the intended biome. Since one of the client’s core requirements was that the world must feel like a dense, fantastical jungle rather than plains or generic fantasy, this outcome shows that the environment development aligned with stakeholder expectations.

A second question tested whether the assets felt natural rather than artificial or science fiction. *Figure 9.2* shows that 90 percent of participants strongly agreed and the remaining 10 percent agreed. No participants associated the visuals with sci-fi or artificial materials. This

directly validates Galea's "Do and Don't" guidelines, particularly the instruction to avoid alien or technological aesthetics.

This environment assets feel natural rather than artificial or sci-fi.

20 yanıtl



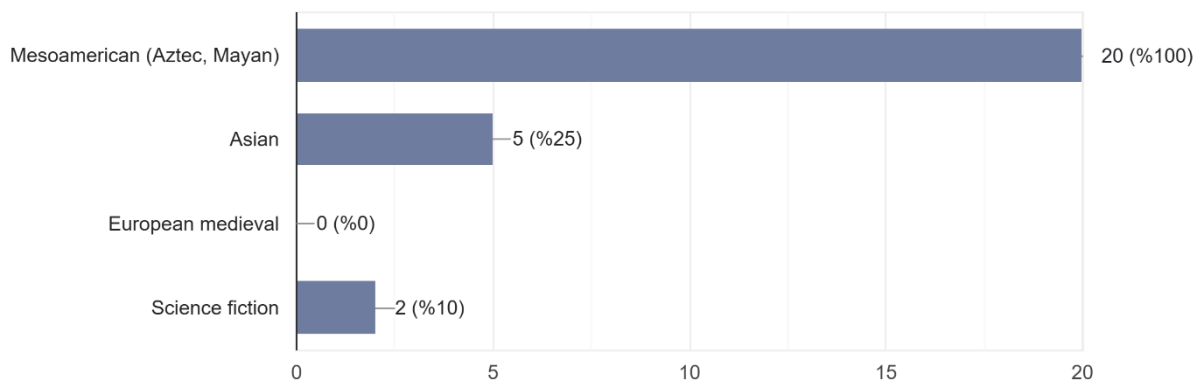
Insert Figure 9.2:

Cultural and Mythological Readability

Participants were asked which cultures they associated with the designs. As shown in *Figure 9.3*, 100 percent selected Mesoamerican (Aztec or Mayan), while 25 percent also selected Asian influences. No participants selected European medieval styles, and only 10 percent selected science fiction.

Which cultures do you associate with these designs?

20 yanıtl



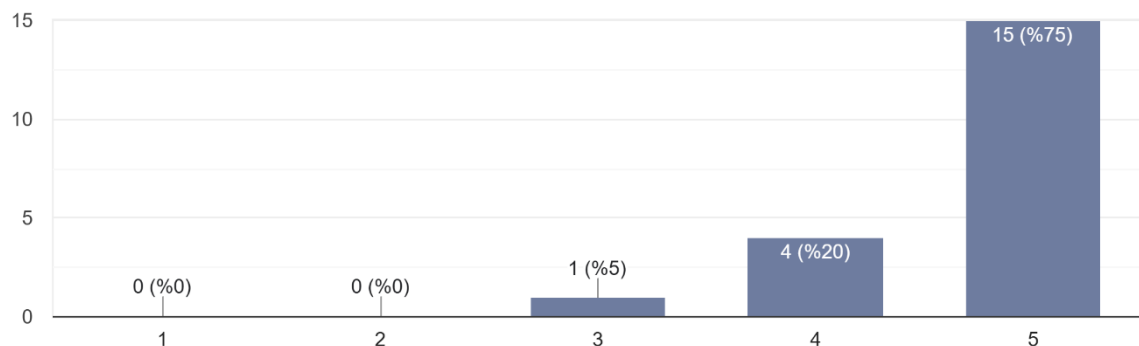
Insert Figure 9.3:

This result is particularly significant for the research question. It demonstrates that the cultural research and visual translation strategies successfully embedded Mesoamerican identity into the designs, even without explicit narrative explanation. The absence of European or medieval associations confirms that the art direction avoided the most common fantasy clichés, as required by the client.

When asked whether the designs felt mythological rather than realistic, *Figure 9.4* shows that 95 percent of participants selected either “agree” or “strongly agree.” This confirms that the combination of exaggerated anatomy, symbolic ornamentation, and stylized materials communicated a mythological world rather than a realistic or naturalistic one.

These designs feel mythological rather than realistic.

20 yanıt



Insert Figure 9.4:

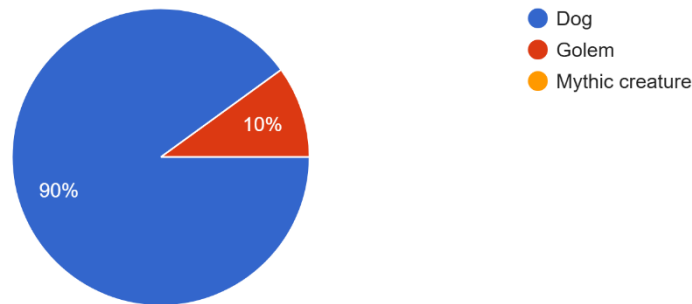
Creature Typology Validation

Three questions tested whether the three creature categories defined in Iteration 1 were visually readable.

As shown in *Figure 9.5*, 90 percent of participants identified the canine creature as hostile, while only 10 percent selected the turtle golem. No participants selected the mythological creature. This confirms that the dog enemy was clearly perceived as the primary hostile unit.

Which creature looks hostile?

20 yanıt

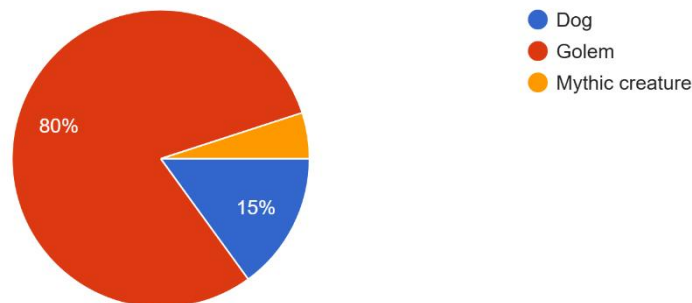


Insert Figure 9.5:

When asked which creature felt like part of the environment, *Figure 9.6* shows that 80 percent selected the turtle golem, compared to 15 percent for the dog and 5 percent for the mythological creature. This strongly supports the success of the Type B Environmental Creature concept.

Which creature feels like part of the environment?

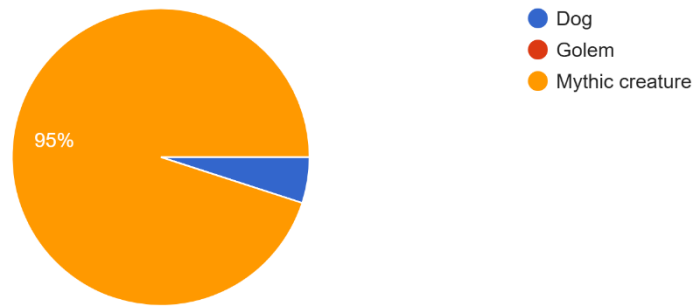
20 yanıt



Insert Figure 9.6:

For the question of which creature felt powerful but non-threatening, *Figure 9.7* shows that 95 percent selected the mythological creature. This result validates the Type C Mythological Creature design logic, confirming that it reads as significant and divine rather than aggressive.

Which creature feels powerful but non-threatening?
20 yanıt



Insert Figure 9.7:

Together, these three results demonstrate that the creature typology system successfully translated abstract art direction rules into readable visual identities.

Scale and Narrative Hierarchy

As shown in *Figure 9.8*, 100 percent of participants identified the mythological creature as the most ancient and important being in the world. This confirms that its silhouette, proportions, and material language successfully communicated narrative hierarchy.

Which creature feels more ancient and important to the world?
20 yanıt

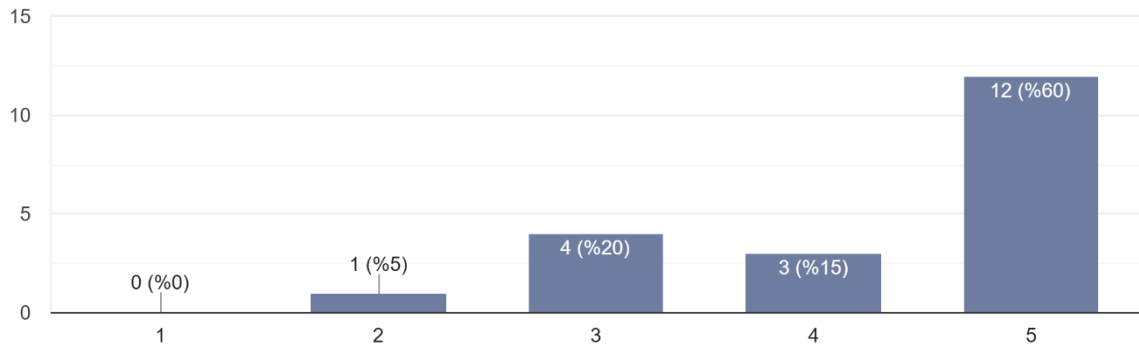


Insert Figure 9.8:

In addition, *Figure 9.9* shows that 75 percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the creature looked powerful without needing excessive size. This supports the research principle that scale can be communicated through proportion, mass, and silhouette rather than raw size, even though a small minority found the question ambiguous.

This creature looks larger than it really needs to be to feel powerful.

20 yanıt



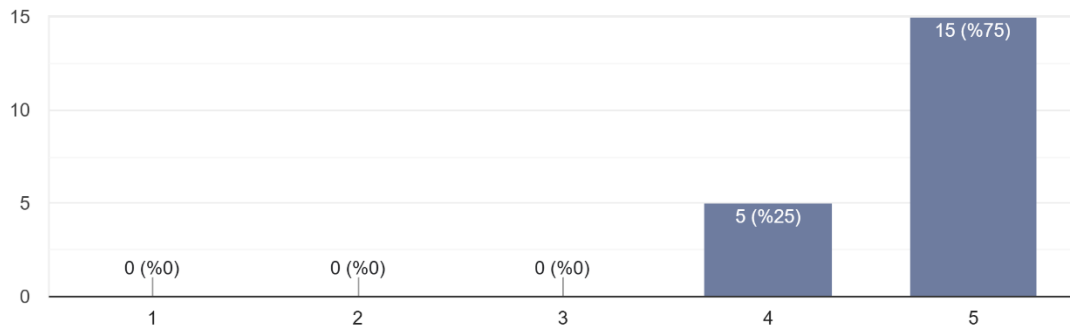
Insert Figure 9.9:

Visual Hierarchy and Readability

As shown in *Figure 9.10*, 75 percent of participants strongly agreed and 25 percent agreed that the main points of interest in the environment key were easy to identify. This indicates that the composition and LOD-based visual hierarchy successfully guided viewer attention.

The main points of interest are easy to identify.

20 yanıt

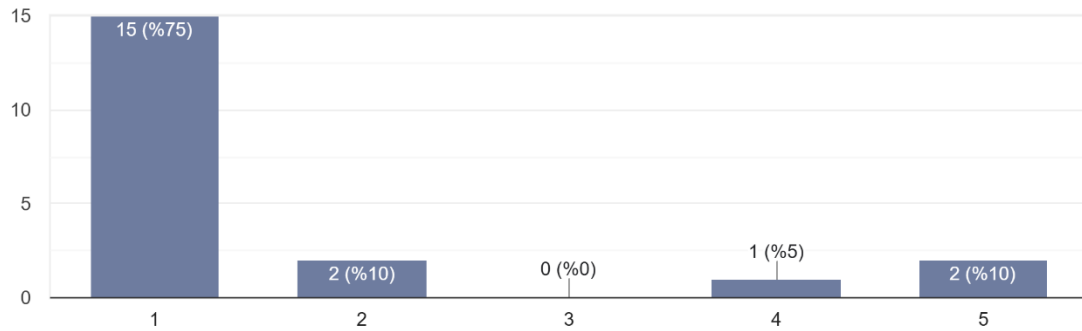


Insert Figure 9.10:

When asked whether the scene felt visually overwhelming, *Figure 9.11* shows that 75 percent strongly disagreed and 10 percent disagreed. This confirms that despite the dense jungle setting, the visual system maintained clarity and avoided clutter.

The scene feels visually overwhelming.

20 yanıt



Insert Figure 9.11:

Conclusion of Testing

The testing results demonstrate that the art direction framework succeeded in unifying visual and narrative identity across creatures and environments while meeting Galea Creations' stylistic constraints. Participants consistently recognized the intended biome, cultural influences, creature roles, and narrative hierarchy without being given contextual information.

This provides empirical validation that the applied art direction was not only internally coherent but also externally readable, fulfilling the core objective of the research.

Conclusions & Discussion

This research investigated how art direction can be used to unify the visual and narrative identity of a stylized action-adventure game while balancing client-defined guidelines with a team's creative interpretation. The results demonstrate that cohesion does not emerge from isolated asset quality but from the consistent application of shared visual rules across creatures, environments, and materials.

The creature design iteration showed that shape language, material logic, and scale cues function as powerful carriers of narrative meaning. The environment iteration demonstrated that color hierarchy, lighting, and compositional structure are essential for communicating biome, mood, and spatial storytelling. The production-oriented texturing phase further confirmed that art direction must extend beyond concept art into material and surface treatment if visual consistency is to be preserved across a multidisciplinary pipeline.

A central finding is that client-driven art direction cannot be applied directly as a static reference material. Galea Creations' production bible provided a necessary foundation, but only through structured interpretation, rule-setting, and iterations did it become a usable visual system for a playable demo. The final art direction framework succeeded because it translated aesthetic intent into operational design logic that multiple artists could follow. The perception testing confirmed that this system was readable to external viewers, with clear recognition of biome, cultural influence, creature purposes, and visual hierarchy.

The project also revealed important limitations. The lack of formally defined narrative design during early production meant that visual design was often required to carry narrative meaning alone. This increased the burden on art direction, as creatures and environments had to imply lore, purpose, and hierarchy without fully developed story systems. In addition, production constraints led to the removal of planned content such as the turtle golem, which limited the range of environmental creature interaction that could be demonstrated in the final demo.

From a production perspective, the art lead role extended beyond concept creation into continuous visual supervision. Because the creatures were sculpted and textured by other artists, cohesion depended on constant feedback, paintovers, front and side views, color guides, and silhouette corrections. These actions were essential to ensure that the final 3D assets reflected the established art direction and could integrate into the game world without stylistic drift. The successful delivery of two production-ready creatures demonstrates that art direction, when supported by clear documentation and iterative communication, can function effectively across disciplinary boundaries.

Overall, the research confirms that art direction is not merely an aesthetic layer but a system of visual governance that enables collaboration, protects narrative intent, and supports production under external constraints.

Recommendations

For future development of Azure Alpha and similar client-based game projects, several improvements are recommended.

First, an art direction framework should be established before the beginning of a large-scale concept production. Even when a production bible exists, it must be translated into clear visual rules and hierarchies that all artists can apply consistently, so that everyone is under the same impression as to what the vision is for the product.

Second, art direction documentation should be treated as a living production tool with strict version control. This prevents outdated references or informal interpretations from causing visual drift during long production cycles.

Third, early alignment between environment, creature, and narrative design should be prioritized. When narrative systems are still undefined, visual design should be supported by at least minimal story and worldbuilding guidelines to prevent conflicting interpretations.

Finally, structured feedback loops between concept artists, 3D artists, and designers should be maintained throughout production. Paintovers, annotated views, and comparison sheets proved highly effective for ensuring that visual intent survived the transition from concept to in-game assets.

These measures would allow art direction to function more effectively as both a creative and organizational system in collaborative productions.

Reflection

This project was the largest and most production-oriented project in which I have held an art lead role. While I have taken on art direction and visual leadership responsibilities in previous projects, the scale, external client involvement, and multidisciplinary pipeline of *Azure Alpha* made this experience significantly closer to professional industry practice. In addition to acting as the sole 2D artist, I was involved across multiple disciplines, including creature and environment concepting, 3D asset supervision, and visual coordination with level design.

One of the main challenges was the lack of fully defined narrative and worldbuilding early in the project. Although Galea provided a production bible, important story and lore elements were introduced late in development. This meant that many of my designs had to carry narrative meaning through visuals alone. While this increased the workload and responsibility, it also forced me to think more carefully about how creatures, environments, and materials communicate story without words.

I also gained valuable experience in working within a production pipeline. By texturing two of the in-game creatures myself, I was able to follow the designs from concept to final asset. This helped me better understand how decisions made during visual development affect the final result in-engine, especially in relation to materials, color balance, and readability.

Core Skills

Acting as art lead required me to develop stronger communication and leadership skills. I had to give frequent feedback to the other artists, review their work, and sometimes request changes to ensure that the art direction was followed. Over time I became more confident in giving clear and direct feedback without being either too soft or too confrontational. Learning how to communicate criticism in a professional and constructive way was one of the most important outcomes of this project.

I was also closely involved in technical decision-making. Even when I was not sculpting or implementing assets myself, I had to understand issues such as mesh quality, texture baking, and material consistency in order to give useful feedback. This made me more comfortable working with 3D pipelines and allowed me to better support the other artists when technical problems occurred.

Working with a motivated and professional team made it easier to take on these responsibilities. At the same time, differences between what the client expected and what was realistically achievable within the scope of a student project required constant negotiation and prioritization. Dealing with these situations taught me how to balance ambition with practicality, which is essential for future work in art direction.

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Appendices

Appendix A Art Direction Framework

Galea Creations

2025 September 15

AZURE ALPHA

Art Direction Document

ART TEAM

Irem Dogan Tycho Wijnen Femke Wiersma

Roles and Responsibilities

Irem	Tycho	Femke
Art Lead	3D Modelling	Rigging
Concept Art	Texturing	Animation for Player
Environment Art	Environment Art	& Creatures
Visual Development	Video Editing	VFX/Shaders & Particles

ART TEAM

7

DELIVERABLES

- 1 Large creature (design, model, animations)
- 2 to 4 different enemy creatures
- 2 Polished movement ability animations
- 2 Neutral creatures used in the level design
- A contained, polished environment design
- The bestiary artbook containing information about all creatures

ART TEAM

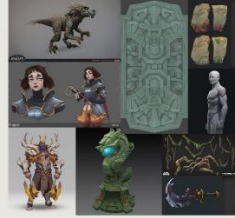
4

STYLESHEET

Shape Language - Angular

A defining feature of the art-style is the angular shape language the stakeholders wish to achieve. We can use the examples provided to see how **harsh lines** and **sharp angles** are used to emphasize different aspects of the characters or environment pieces.

Creating models with this principle in mind will aid in pushing this style further later on with the hand-painted textures. When modelling, sculpting or concepting, keep in mind to utilize angles and harsh lines with intent to tell the player something about the character or environment piece.



ART TEAM

2

COLOR PALETTE

Vibrant Accents

When it comes to color usage, we should not be afraid to lean into **bright, vibrant tones** as accents throughout both character and environment pieces. These colors do not necessarily mean everything will be neon, but rather that **bold, recognizable hues** can be used to bring focus and clarity in the design.

This works in tandem with more **muted base palettes**, allowing accents to stand out without overwhelming the overall look. In concepting and hand-painted textures, strong color choices help maintain readability while adding personality.



ART TEAM

4

COLOR PALETTE

Color as Narrative

Color also functions as a narrative tool, signaling a character's **race, faction or affinity**, or understand the tone of an environment through deliberate palette decisions.

A good example of this is **"Hollow Knight"**, where different areas are marked by distinct palettes that emphasize danger or atmosphere, while still maintaining overall harmony. This approach allows color to guide the player's perception and reinforce the worlds identity without breaking visual cohesion.



ART TEAM

4

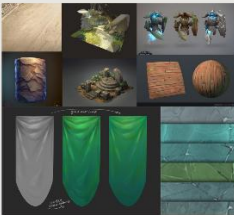
COLOR VARIATION

Same Material Surfaces

To push for more visual fidelity in the textures and materials, and to achieve an almost **hand-painted** feeling, we should aim for color variation in the materials.

The example provided is to show how these singular materials utilize a whole, **cohesive color-palette** to achieve a good looking material, one that is **reusable** and can easily be tweaked to create even more materials with slight color changes.

Make use of adjustable tools such as gradient maps and curve maps for maximum accuracy when tweaking.



ART TEAM

3

STYLIZATION

Highlighted Edges

For further stylization, we'll be using highlighted edges in materials and textures. Building our materials in this way serves to draw more attention to the angular shape-language the stakeholders want to achieve.

The provided examples demonstrate how small edges and angles are **highlighted with color** in the material itself, not actual light sources or additional scene elements.

Substance Painter has a lot of nice options like **"Edge Wear"** and **"Edge Damage"** which should be utilized to achieve this look and feel.



ART TEAM

4

VISUAL DEVELOPMENT

Environment

For the deep jungle environment, we should approach visual development by breaking the area down into smaller, manageable **components** by developing unique designs for foliage, vegetation, trees, rock formations, and the overall ecosystem.

By prototyping and sketching out these individual aspects first before developing the assets, we can build a library of **reusable visual elements** that feel cohesive when brought together. The examples demonstrate how leaves, tree shapes, and rock silhouettes can carry as much weight as full environment scenes when it comes to defining look and feel.



ART TEAM

4

VISUAL DEVELOPMENT

Props and Weapons

For the props and weapons, designs should reflect the culture and storytelling of the tribe inhabiting the jungle. These objects are not just functional, but **visual extensions of the world** and its people. Materials like carved wood, bone, stone, and woven fibers can be emphasized to ground the designs in the environment.

Weapons should feel **hand-crafted** and unique, carrying the angular language established in our direction, but with room for creativity in silhouettes and ornamentation.



ART TEAM

4

IREM DOGAN

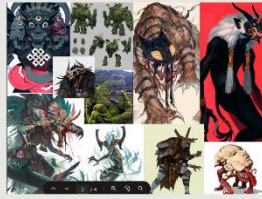
42

VISUAL INSPIRATIONS

AREA ONE CREATURES

Monsters

- Significantly smaller than mythical beasts, still far bigger than player character
- Disturbed spirits of neglected temples
- Hostile, can be appeased
- Look distorted, shadow effect or multiple eyes/limbs
- Found in Deep Jungle



ART TEAM

4

VISUAL INSPIRATIONS

AREA ONE CREATURES

Wildlife

- Natural creatures found in the wild
- Bigger than player
- Can either be hostile or friendly
- Can be based off real creatures, can be mythical or hybrids
- Avoid simply scaling up existing animals



ART TEAM

4

VISUAL INSPIRATIONS

AREA ONE CREATURES

NPCs

- Bugfolk, can be multiple types of bug-like creatures
- Frogfolk/Lizardfolk
- Plant/Tree/Flowerfolk
- "Masked" folk, appear to be wearing masks, actually, their face. Main race of the city, very colorful with a focus on markings on skin. Can be based on different masks.
- Avoid "too human" faces



ART TEAM

4

VISUAL INSPIRATIONS

Mythical Creatures

- Giants of Myth - some worshipped, others feared
- Mostly in the back - ground
- Highly dangerous if provoked
- Can be part of the terrain



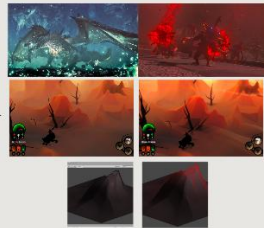
ART TEAM

4

VFX

Shaders

- Mythic glow. No realism or sci fi.
- Color shows role. Enemies red. Nature green. Mythic pale.
- Soft gradients and rim light. No heavy PBR.
- Glow only on eyes, cores, and interactables.
- Effects must support gameplay clarity.



ART TEAM

4

Gaea Creations

2025 September 15

THANK YOU

Good Luck :)

ART TEAM

Irem Dogan

Tycho Wijnen

Femke Wiersma

Slides created using Canva (Canva Pty Ltd., 2024)

Appendix B

Survey Instrument and Raw Data

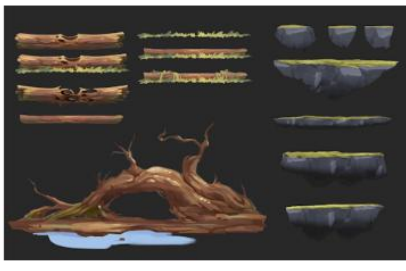


Visual Direction Perception Test for Azure Alpha

This survey tests how well the visual design of Azure Alpha communicates its intended world, creatures, and atmosphere in terms of art direction. You will be shown images from the game's concept art and asked a few questions about what you perceive. There are no right or wrong answers! The goal is to understand how the visuals are interpreted by viewers.

* Zorunlu soruyu belirtir

Section 1: Biome and Environment Recognition



The assets look like they belong to a jungle environment. *

Refer to the image above.

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly disagree

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

Strongly agree

This environment assets feel natural rather than artificial or sci-fi. *

Refer to the image above.

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly disagree

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

Strongly agree

Section 2: Cultural and Mythological Readability



Which cultures do you associate with these designs? *

Refer to the image above.

☐ Mesoamerican (Aztec, Mayan)

☐ Asian

☐ European medieval

☐ Science fiction

☐ Diğer: _____

These designs feel mythological rather than realistic. *

Refer to the image above.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree

☐☐☐☐☐

Strongly agree

Section 3: Creature Typology Validation



Which creature looks hostile? *

Refer to the images above.

☐ Dog

☐ Golem

☐ Mythic creature

Which creature feels like part of the environment? *

Refer to the images above.

☐ Dog

☐ Golem

☐ Mythic creature

Which creature feels powerful but non-threatening? *

Refer to the images above.

☐ Dog

☐ Golem

☐ Mythic creature

Section 4: Scale and Importance



Which creature feels more ancient and important to the world? *

Refer to the image above. (Look closely)

- ☐ Mythic creature
- ☐ Dog enemy

This creature looks larger than it really needs to be to feel powerful. *

Refer to the image above.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

Section 5: Visual Hierarchy and Readability



The main points of interest are easy to identify. *

Refer to the image above.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

The scene feels visually overwhelming. *

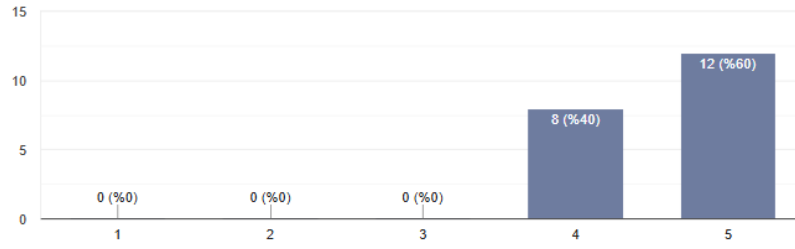
Refer to the image above.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

The assets look like they belong to a jungle environment.

[Grafik kopyala](#)

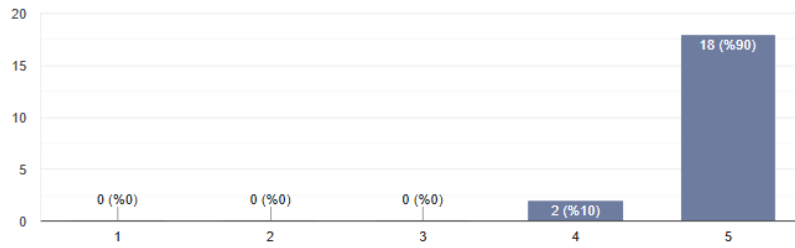
20 yanıt



This environment assets feel natural rather than artificial or sci-fi.

[Grafik kopyala](#)

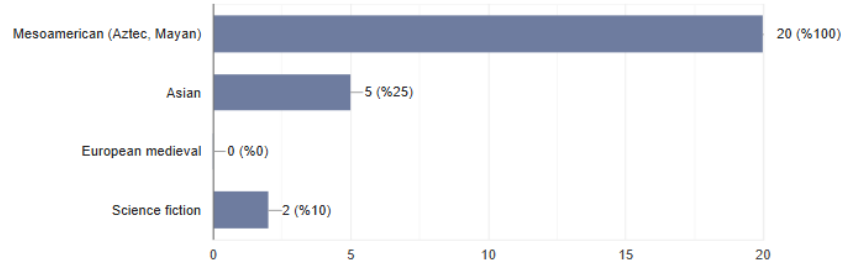
20 yanıt



Which cultures do you associate with these designs?

[Grafik kopyala](#)

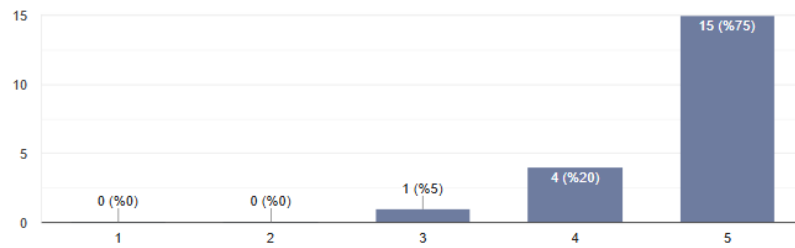
20 yanıt



These designs feel mythological rather than realistic.

[Grafik kopyala](#)

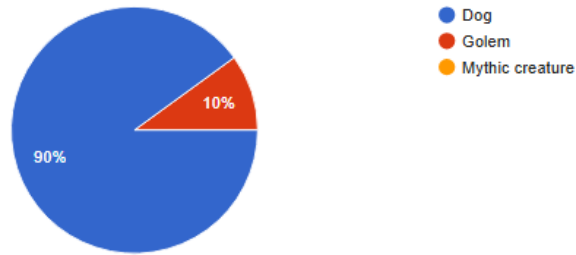
20 yanıt



Which creature looks hostile?

 [Grafığı kopyala](#)

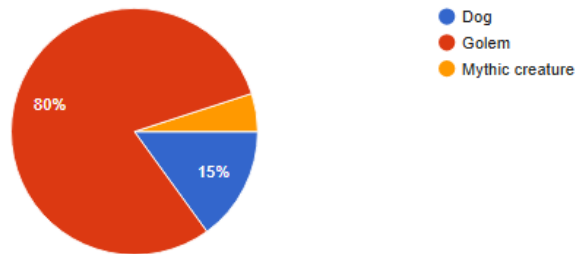
20 yanıt



Which creature feels like part of the environment?

 [Grafığı kopyala](#)

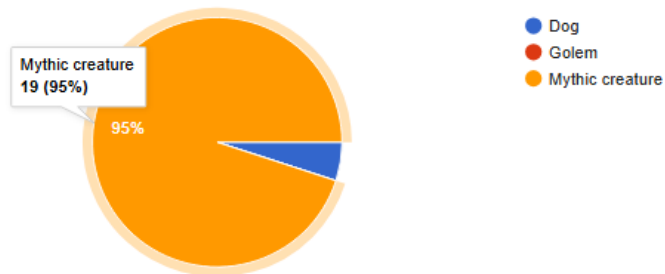
20 yanıt



Which creature feels powerful but non-threatening?

 [Grafığı kopyala](#)

20 yanıt



Which creature feels more ancient and important to the world?

 [Grafığı kopyala](#)

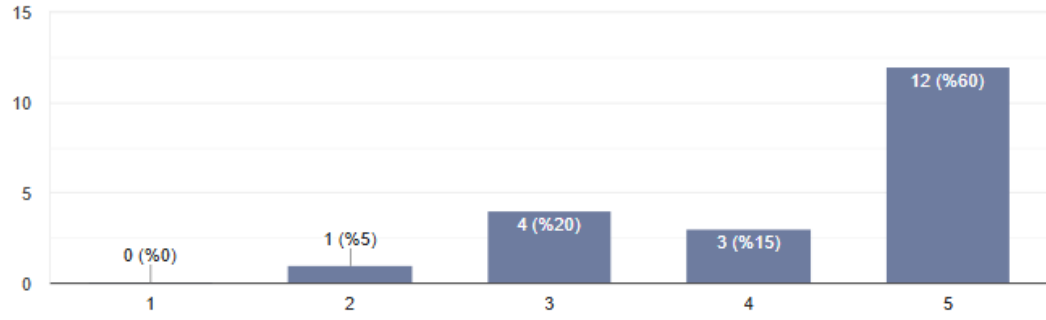
20 yanıt



This creature looks larger than it really needs to be to feel powerful.

 Grafik kopyala

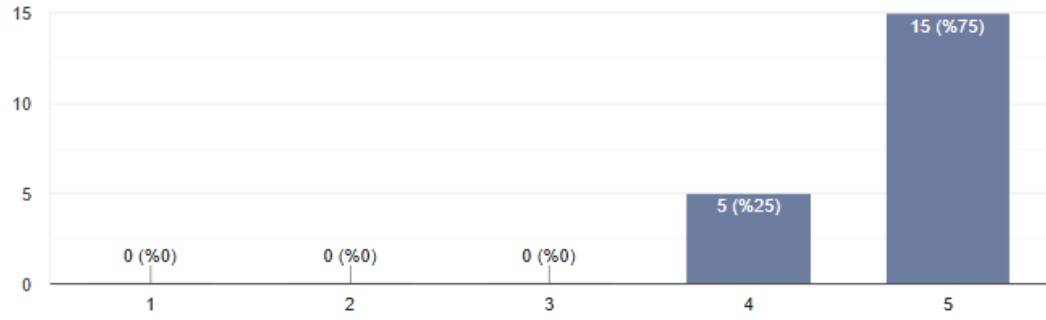
20 yanıt



The main points of interest are easy to identify.

 Grafik kopyala

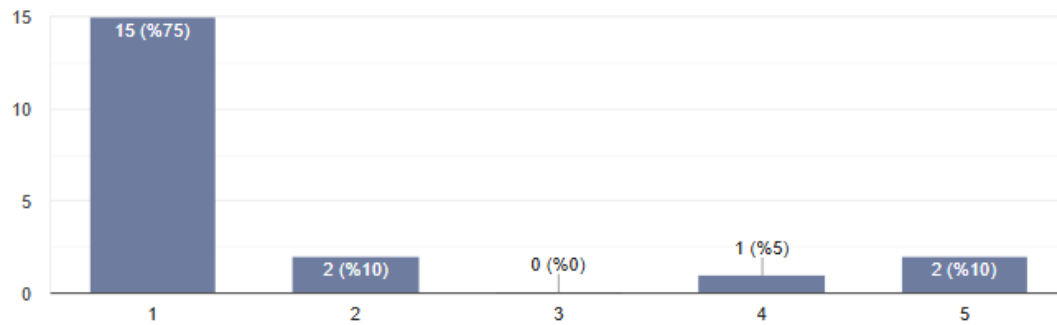
20 yanıt



The scene feels visually overwhelming.

 Grafik kopyala

20 yanıt



Appendix C
Production Evidence



Figure C1. Canine creature turnaround sheet



Figure C2. Mythological creature turnaround sheet

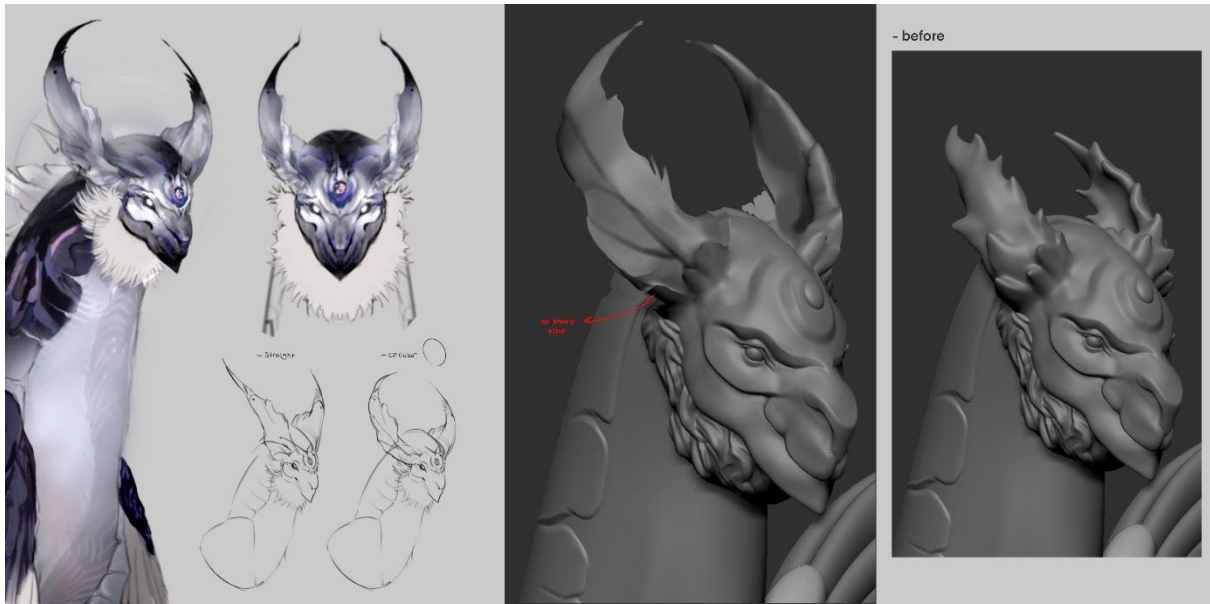


Figure C3. Mythological creature ear shape paintover

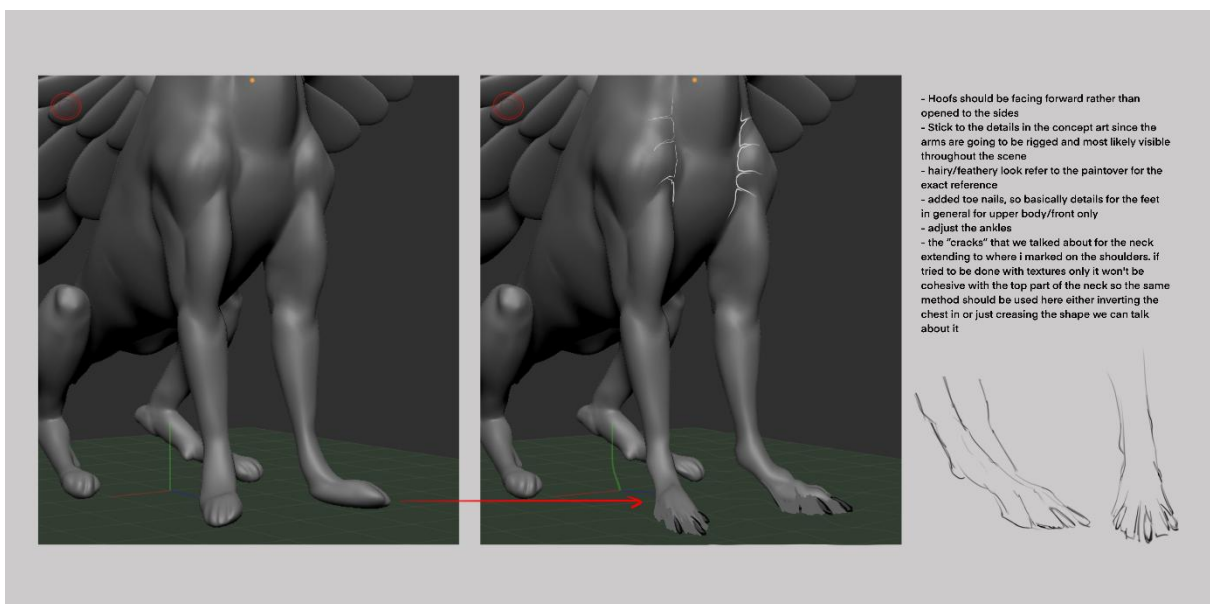


Figure C4. Mythological creature hoof/foot paintover

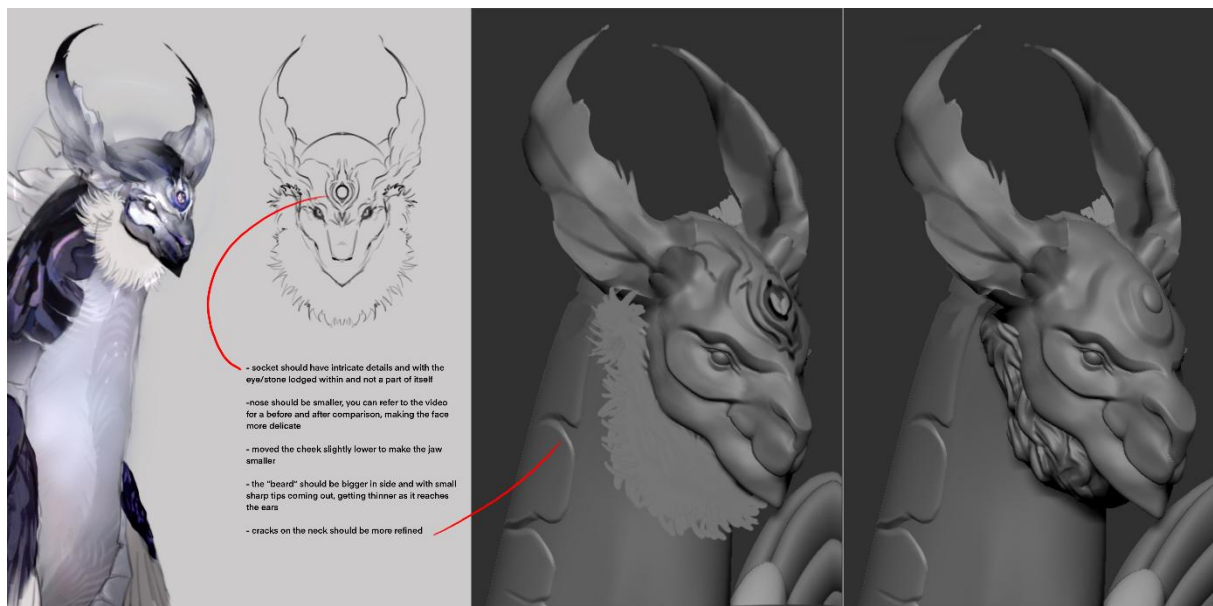


Figure C5. Mythological creature head paintover



Figure C6. Mythological creature base color and final texture comparison



Figure C7. Canine creature base color and final texture comparison



Figure C8. Azure Alpha logo design

Appendix D

Glossary

Art Direction Framework

A structured system of visual rules defining color, shape, material, scale, and hierarchy used to maintain visual consistency across all assets.

Asset Inventory

A structured list of all characters, creatures, props, and environments required for the vertical slice.

Biomes

Distinct environmental zones with unique visual and gameplay characteristics such as jungle, wetlands, or temple areas.

Creature Typology

A classification system used to group creatures by their narrative and visual role, such as Hybrid Beasts, Environmental Creatures, and Mythological Beings.

Environment Key

A fully rendered concept image showing the intended mood, lighting, and composition of the game world.

Internal Art Direction Document

A slide-based guide created for the team that translates research and client references into usable visual rules.

Itzcuintli

A mythological hairless dog from Aztec culture, used as a cultural inspiration for the canine enemy design.

LOD (Level of Detail) Hierarchy

A system that defines how much visual complexity an asset should have based on its importance and distance from the player.

Mythological Creature

A symbolic, god-like being that represents narrative or world importance rather than standard gameplay enemies.

Pauhtun

A Mayan mythological being associated with the turtle and the act of holding up the heavens, used as inspiration for the turtle golem concept.

Production Bible

The official design document provided by Galea Creations that defines the world, tone, and visual constraints of Azure Alpha.

Shape Language

The use of rounded, angular, or heavy forms to communicate character traits such as friendliness, danger, or power.

Stylized Workflow

A production approach using exaggerated forms, painted textures, and non-realistic materials to create a consistent visual style.

Visual Hierarchy

A system that controls what the player notices first through contrast, scale, color, and lighting.

Visual System

The combined rules governing color, shape, material, scale, and effects that define the world's identity.