Whispers of Light

Instructor: Professor Leonardo Moura
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Group-4 Members:
Kavya Bhavinkumar Shah
Divya Devendrasinh Rana
Gaurav Amol Vedak
Veysel Toprak
Srujal Gaurangbhai Patel

Part 1: Technical Optimization Write-up

For Assignment 3, we decided to optimize our 3D model of the Shrine of Memories, which was created in Assignment 2. The main goal of this optimization was to reduce the model's poly count to make it more efficient for game engines like Unity or Unreal Engine, while keeping the look and style of the original design.

This kind of optimization is particularly important in the game development industry, where efficiency and performance are crucial. Although a high-poly model may appear great in a render, it might create delay, longer loading times, or even crashes when used in a real-time engine, particularly on mobile devices or virtual reality. Therefore, we aimed to achieve a balance between maintaining the model's game-ready state and maintaining its visual impact.

Knowing what to keep was one of the difficulties we faced. Some tiny design elements looked nice up close, but didn't add much to the overall shape or feel of the model. It took a lot of zooming in and out and some trial and error to determine what might be made simpler without losing the shrine's significant aura. This changed the process from simply removing geometry to feeling more like sculpting.

After optimization, we cleaned up the UV layout to ensure there were no overlapping or stretched textures and renamed all the parts of the model using meaningful names (e.g., "Shrine_Base" instead of "Cube.001").

Poly count comparison:

Metric	Before Optimization	After Optimization	Difference
Vertices	519,020	388,822	130198
Faces	518,357	388,266	130091
File Size	814 kB	791 kB	23kB

Part 2: Market Research & Competitive Analysis

Industry Context
Games with emotional storytelling, peaceful exploration, and artistic visuals are becoming more and more popular, especially in the indie scene. Titles like Gris, Spiritfarer, and Journey have shown that players enjoy experiences that are calm, meaningful, and visually creative. These types of games tend to use stylized graphics (like low-poly or hand-drawn styles), which not only look unique but also perform well in different game engines.

Tools like Unity URP, Unreal Engine 5, and animation plug-ins now help small studios and students create beautiful games without needing a huge team or budget. Our ideal players are seeking a peaceful moment in their day, such as someone who wants to relax after work or find a quiet place to think. They can enter an emotionally rich and private world while wearing headphones and listening to the game's ambient soundtrack.

Our game, Whispers of Light, fits into this trend perfectly — it focuses on calm exploration, emotional visuals, and storytelling through environments rather than characters or dialogue.

Competitive Analysis
1. Ori and the Blind Forest

- **Strengths:** Beautiful visuals, emotional story, and fluid gameplay mechanics.
- **Weaknesses:** Can be too challenging for casual players; the saving system is frustrating for some.
- **Reception:** Very positive; highly rated and popular on Steam and Xbox.

2. Spiritfarer

- **Strengths:** Unique theme (life and death), hand-drawn animation, cozy feel, deep story.
- **Weaknesses:** Gets repetitive over time, especially the management tasks.
- **Reception:** Excellent reviews, especially for art style and emotional storytelling.

3. Journey

- **Strengths:** Peaceful gameplay, beautiful visuals, and innovative multiplayer experience.
- **Weaknesses:** Very short game length; not much replay value.
- **Reception:** Hugely successful; won Game of the Year awards and still remembered for its emotional impact.

Positioning Strategy
Whispers of Light is different from these games because it focuses on exploring emotional spaces through architecture and lighting, rather than characters or action. Our shrine locations reflect inner emotions, such as grief, hope, or nostalgia. This gives the player a peaceful and meditative experience while discovering the story at their own pace.

Unlike Ori, there is no platforming or combat. Compared to Spiritfarer, we don't rely on text or characters — we let the world speak for itself. While Journey has a similar emotional vibe, Whispers of Light gives players a bit more control and freedom to explore symbolic locations. Even though we respect what these titles do, we noticed a chance to examine emotion in a more quiet, symbolic manner. We use the building itself—the light, color, and space—to tell a story rather than using conversation or gameplay to direct players. This method gives you the impression that you are wandering through a dream that is exclusively for you, making the experience feel interpretative and personal.
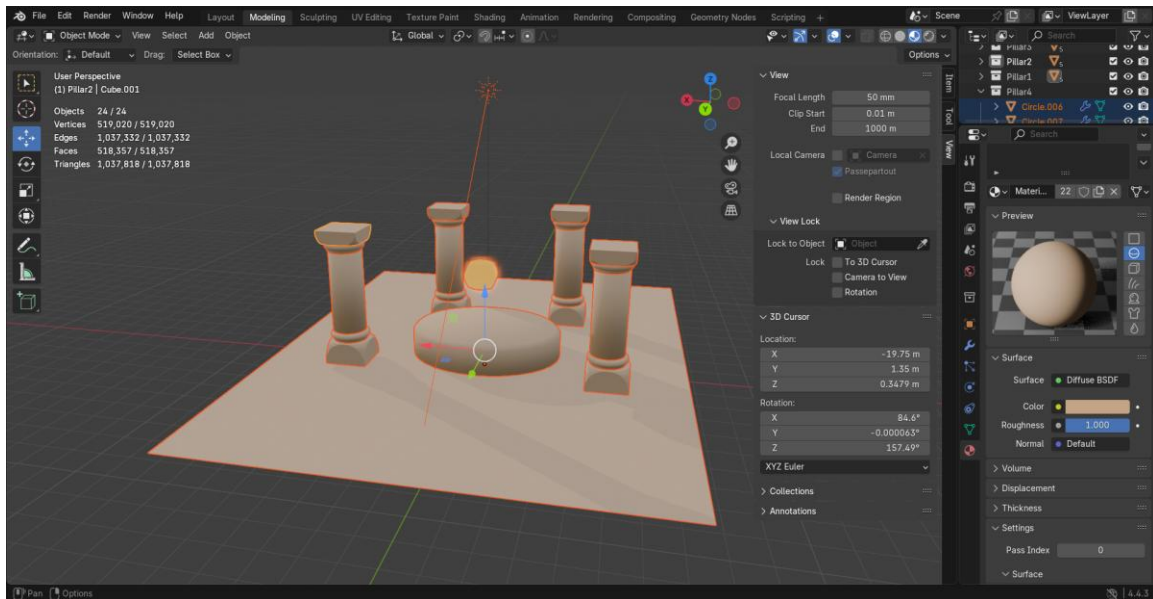
We think players who enjoy games like Abzû, A Short Hike, or Gris would really enjoy our game. It's made for people who want to relax, explore, and experience something beautiful and meaningful.

Imagine that a player enters a dimly lit shrine with a pool of calm water lit by shafts of light that filter through a damaged roof.
There are no words, but there is a sense of place evoked by the color, the design, and the calm.
It might be grief. It might be quiet.
Whispers of Light is about allowing you the room to feel what you want to feel, rather than telling you what to feel.

BEFORE:

AFTER: