Week 2: Future Archaeology

My thinking

This week, I continued exploring the idea of Nuclear Semiotics, but I wanted to approach it from a different perspective.

In Week 1, I focused on how danger could be communicated through the environment itself, without relying on written language or recognisable symbols. For Week 2, I began to think about the opposite question: **What if a future civilisation discovered objects left behind by humans, but had no understanding of their original purposes?**

What interested me was the idea that physical objects might survive for thousands of years, while the meanings attached to them could gradually disappear. When the people, cultural contexts, and languages associated with these objects are gone, future observers might only be able to guess their functions based on their shapes and structures.

This led me to imagine an archaeological exhibition set tens of thousands of years in the future. In this imagined world, an unknown civilisation has discovered objects left behind by humanity and attempted to repair and reconstruct them according to its own understanding. However, without any real knowledge of human civilisation, the results become strange, absurd, and sometimes even humorous.

I didn't want these objects to look like completely unfamiliar abstract sculptures. Instead, I wanted viewers to recognise some of their individual elements, while still feeling confused about why they had been combined in such unusual ways. **This contrast between familiarity and unfamiliarity became the starting point for my visual exploration.**

Visual Research & Exploration

After developing the initial concept, I began thinking about how to visually represent a future civilisation's misunderstanding of human artefacts.

While developing my visual research, I looked at artworks that use found objects and assemblage. For example, Sarah Lucas combines furniture with human–like forms, while Robert Rauschenberg brings unrelated objects together in unexpected ways, challenging their original functions and meanings. These works made me think more about **how familiar objects could be interpreted differently when removed from their original**

contexts.

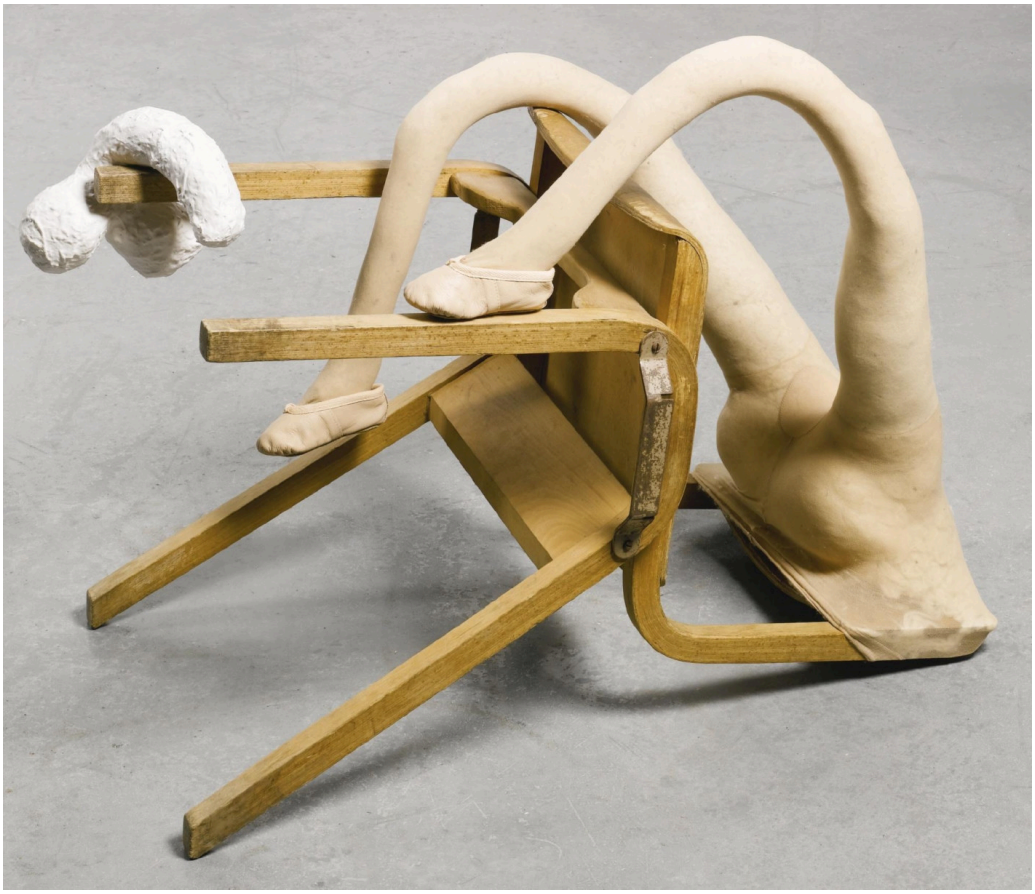


Fig. 1. Sarah Lucas, Reggie Only, 2006. An exploration of the relationship between everyday objects and human–like forms.

I also found an interesting connection between my concept and Damien Hirst's *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable*. By presenting fictional archaeological artefacts, the exhibition blurs the boundary between history and imagination. It made me think about how objects cannot fully communicate their own histories, and how our understanding of them often depends on cultural context.



Fig. 2. Damien Hirst, Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable, 2017. A fictional archaeological exhibition exploring the boundaries between history and imagination.

During my own visual exploration, I experimented with different forms and combinations. Some of the early designs were quite abstract, almost resembling surreal sculptures. Although I found them visually interesting, I gradually realised that making the objects too abstract could weaken the original concept. If viewers couldn't recognise any part of an object, it would be difficult for them to notice the misunderstanding behind its reconstruction.

I then started focusing more on familiar everyday objects, experimenting with breaking their original functions and structures and combining elements with different materials and purposes.

I wanted the final objects to exist somewhere between familiarity and unfamiliarity. Viewers might recognise individual parts, but feel confused about why they had been connected to something completely unrelated.

Rather than simply creating strange–looking forms, I wanted these combinations to suggest that another civilisation had genuinely tried to understand human artefacts, but had reached the wrong conclusions. This gradually became the main direction for my later object designs.

Object Design & Development

After establishing the overall visual direction, I began developing the main objects for the exhibition.

I experimented with connecting objects that originally had nothing to do with each other, making them look as if they had been incorrectly repaired. For example, I combined fragments of plaster human sculptures with everyday items such as staplers and straps. These elements originally had their own clear functions, but when placed into new relationships, their meanings began to change.

Throughout the design process, I kept adjusting the forms and complexity of the objects. Some early combinations contained too many details. Although they looked visually rich, their structures were not very clear and sometimes felt too chaotic. I gradually removed unnecessary elements to give each object a more recognisable form, while keeping the sense of collage and incorrect reconstruction.



Fig. 3. Early visual experiments exploring abstract and surreal combinations of familiar objects. October 2026.

I also became interested in the contrast between different materials, **such as plaster, metal, plastic, and fabric**. These materials originally belonged to completely different objects, but when brought together into a single structure, they created an unusual and slightly uncomfortable visual relationship.

When developing these designs into 3D models, I separated some of the more complex structures into individual parts before modelling and assembling them. This allowed me more flexibility when adjusting proportions, connections, and overall forms.
For me, the most interesting part of this stage was trying to give these seemingly absurd combinations their own sense of logic. They didn’t need to make sense according to human habits, but I wanted viewers to believe that an unknown civilisation might genuinely interpret them in this way.











Fig. 4. Development of the final visual direction, focusing on the reconstruction and reinterpretation of familiar objects. October 2026.

Scene Development & Unity

After developing the main objects, I began thinking about how to bring them together within a virtual environment.

Initially, I considered presenting them in a more traditional museum setting, but I felt that this might limit the way the objects could be experienced. Instead, I became more interested in **creating an open space without clear boundaries, where these incorrectly reconstructed artefacts could float freely in the environment**.

For the scene design, I chose a **relatively simple gradient background** to reduce unnecessary visual distractions and keep the focus on the objects themselves.

Presenting the objects in a floating arrangement also removed them from their familiar everyday contexts, making them feel even more strange and unfamiliar.

While building the scene in Unity, I experimented with the scale, position, and spacing of the objects. I wanted to create a sense of depth without making the environment feel too

crowded. I also adjusted the lighting and materials to make the different surface textures more visible while maintaining a consistent visual atmosphere.

During the Unity scene development, I made several adjustments to the background. Initially, I experimented with a simple gradient background, but the result felt quite harsh. The colour transitions lacked a natural sense of space, and the edges of the background plane were still noticeable. I realised that a flat background was not ideal for a VR environment, as viewers could freely look around and the background needed to remain continuous from different directions.

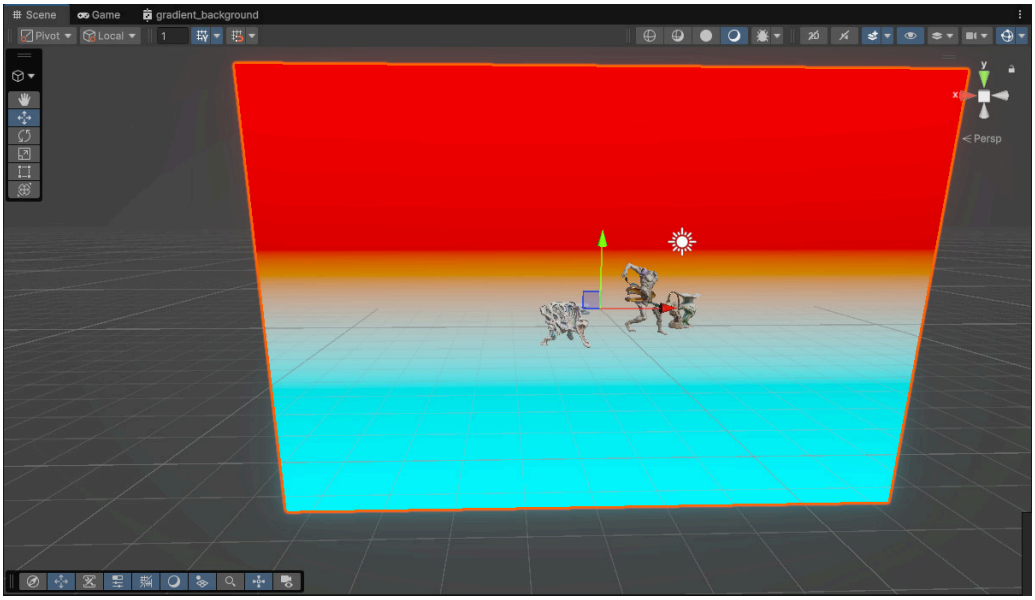


Fig. 5 — Initial Gradient Background

I then experimented with placing the entire scene inside a large sphere and creating a gradient material using Shader Graph. This allowed the background to surround the virtual environment rather than remain as a flat surface, making the overall space feel more natural.

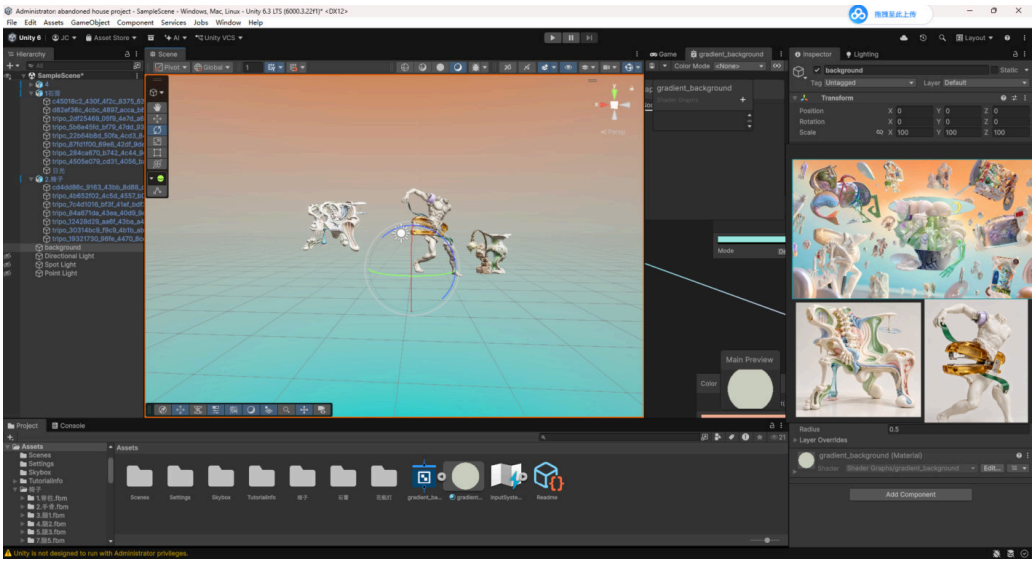


Fig. 6 — Spherical Background

However, the initial gradient still felt too regular, with the colours arranged mostly in horizontal layers. I continued adjusting the gradient direction in Shader Graph, creating a diagonal transition between different colours.

Through these changes, the background became more than just a simple colour fill. It started to contribute to the visual composition of the scene. The tilted gradient created a

stronger sense of depth and gave the floating objects a more surreal atmosphere.

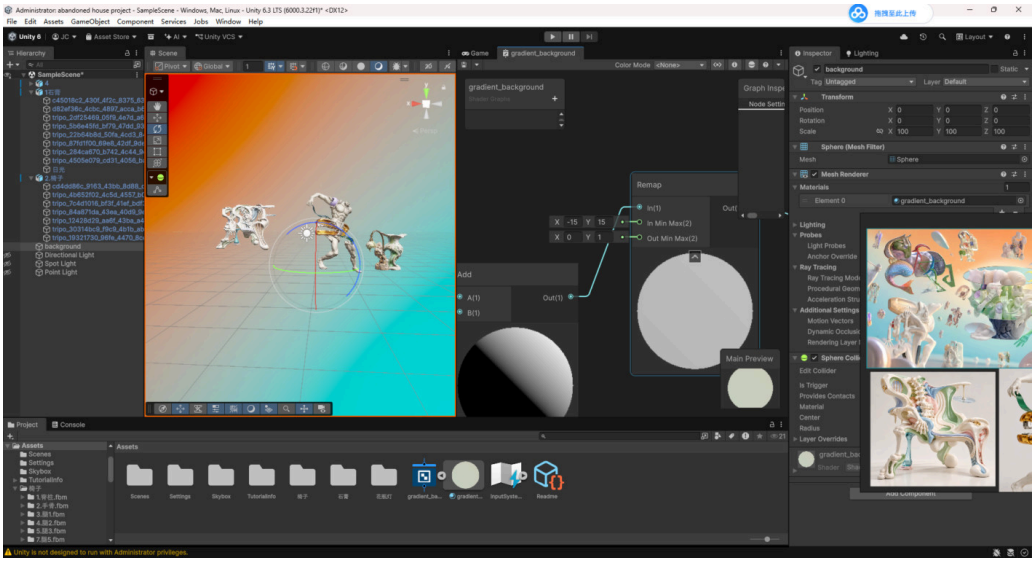


Fig. 7 — Gradient Direction Adjustment

Besides working on the background, I also experimented with creating a water material using Shader Graph in Unity. I applied it to one of the objects containing fish and aquatic plants.

Initially, I focused on making the water transparent enough for viewers to see the objects inside. However, I found that simply reducing the opacity didn't make the material look like real water. Instead, it appeared more like ordinary transparent glass.

I then started learning how to use noise nodes and normal variations in Shader Graph to simulate subtle movement on the water's surface. I also experimented with time–based effects to make the material feel less static.

During this process, I adjusted the transparency, smoothness, and colour of the material, trying to create a sense of movement without making the fish and plants inside difficult to see.

This experiment helped me develop a better understanding of material creation in Unity. I began to realise that materials do more than define the appearance of an object's surface. They also influence how viewers perceive the space and structures inside it.

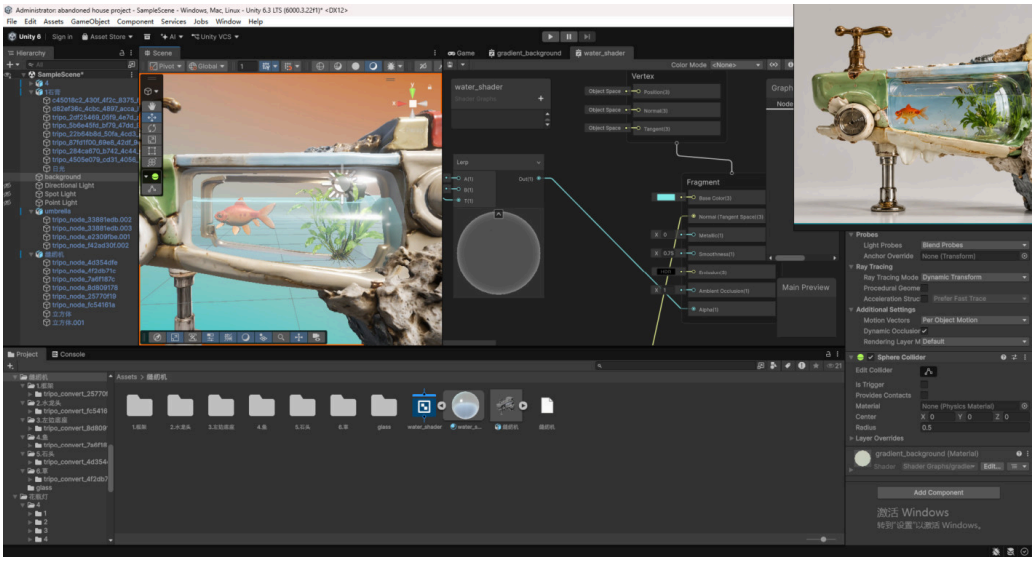


Fig. 8 — Water Material Experiment

During this process, I gradually realised that the environment itself could influence how viewers interpreted the objects. The same combination might simply appear strange in

an everyday setting, but when suspended in an unfamiliar and quiet space, it could begin to feel like an archaeological artefact from an unknown civilisation.
I wanted the environment to become more than just a background for displaying models. It also needed to contribute to the overall narrative of the experience.

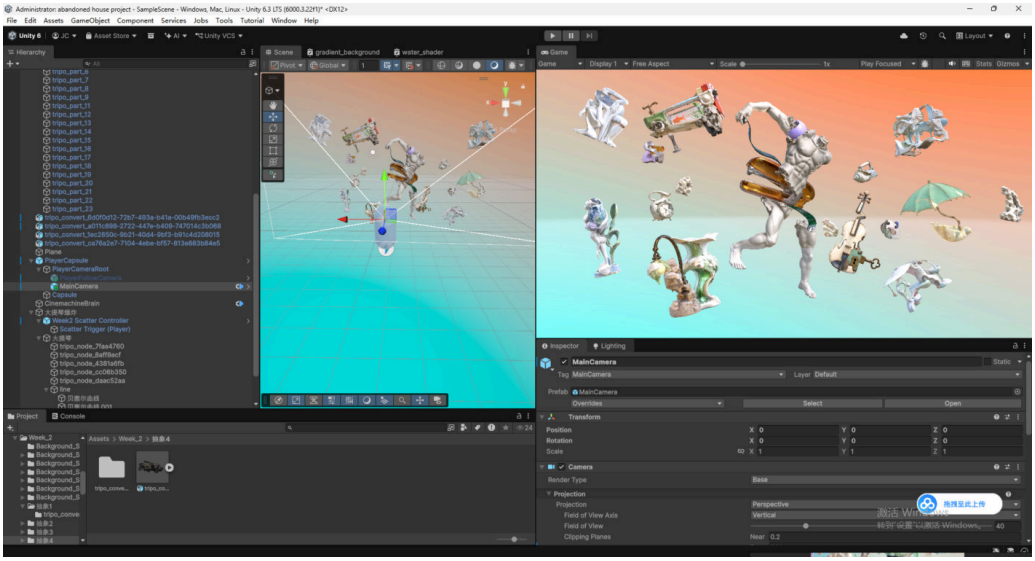


Fig. 9. Unity scene development showing the spatial arrangement of floating artefacts and the overall exhibition environment

Interaction & Sound Design

After completing the scene, we began thinking about how viewers could interact with the objects in the exhibition. At this stage, I proposed the initial interaction concept: when the player approaches an exhibit, its connected parts gradually separate, as if the incorrectly reconstructed artefact is falling apart.
I wanted this interaction to create a sense of instability as viewers explored the space, while connecting their actions to the future civilisation's mistaken reconstruction of human artefacts.
For the sound design, I was responsible for developing the audio effects used in the interaction.
I wanted the sounds to respond to the player's actions while also matching the strange and surreal atmosphere of the environment. I experimented with AI sound generation tools to explore different audio styles. I focused on creating delicate, crystal–like tones combined with the sounds of objects colliding and fragments separating. My aim was to make the disassembly feel slightly physical, but also ethereal and unreal.
During this process, I kept refining the prompts and experimenting with different results to find sounds that better suited the atmosphere of the scene. I also considered the timing of the audio in relation to the interaction, hoping that the sounds would naturally emphasise the moment when the player approached an object and triggered its separation.
Through this experiment, I began to realise that sound is more than just a supplement to visual effects. It can also help viewers perceive movement and contribute to the overall atmosphere of a virtual environment.



Fig. 10. AI-assisted sound design experiments using ElevenLabs, exploring crystal-like tones and object disassembly effects for the VR interaction. October 2026.

Reflection & Conclusion

Looking back on Week 2, I think the most interesting part of this project was gradually realising that the meaning of an object is not fixed. The same object can be interpreted in completely different ways depending on the cultural background and knowledge of the observer.

During the visual design process, I also realised that creating a sense of unfamiliarity doesn't necessarily require completely abstract forms. Combining recognisable objects in unexpected ways can actually be more effective in making viewers question what they are seeing. This made me pay more attention to the relationship between visual forms and concepts, rather than simply focusing on visual complexity.

On the technical side, I became more familiar with scene development and Shader Graph in Unity. I experimented with gradient backgrounds, water materials, and spatial composition, exploring how these elements could influence the overall atmosphere. Although I encountered some challenges along the way, the process of testing and adjusting helped me develop a better understanding of virtual environment design.

The interaction and sound design also made me think more about how storytelling in VR doesn't always need to rely on direct explanations. The viewer's movement, changes in the objects, and audio feedback can all become ways of communicating an idea.

This project also brought me back to one of the questions behind Nuclear Semiotics: even if humans manage to preserve objects or information for thousands of years, can we really control how future civilisations will understand them?

Perhaps meaning cannot be preserved as completely as the objects themselves. Instead, it continues to change each time something is discovered and interpreted again.