

Over- fashion

Over fashion is a visual project that uses the structure of The Emperor's New Clothes to reflect on the modern fashion industry. It explores how style has become more important than function, and how branding often turns ordinary objects into symbols of inflated value. Inspired by real experiences and market research, the project questions how easily people accept discomfort and impracticality in the name of fashion. Through visual storytelling, it satirizes the way brands, consumers, and the industry at large participate in creating and sustaining illusions. Over fashion is not just about pointing out the absurdities; it is about revealing the fragile system of belief that allows them to thrive.

I'm sick of everything being turned into a fashion product. Trash is still trash — dressing it up with "design concepts" is just absurd, pretentious nonsense.

我受够了什么东西都是时尚产品了，垃圾就是垃圾说什么设计理念这纯属荒谬的无病呻吟

MING WEI

Project Background and Core Question

This project originated from a personal experience. I once purchased a pair of Balenciaga Trooper rain boots in 2021, they look visually striking, sculptural, and unmistakably stylish. Unboxing them felt like opening a design object rather than a pair of shoes. But once I put them on, the reality shifted. The boots were extremely rigid, heavy, and uncomfortable to walk in. Each step felt labored, as if I were dragging weights. Fortunately, it can easily attract the attention of strangers, and many strangers told me that this is a cool pair of shoes. But enduring this pain just to be cool is starting to make me feel like I wasn't wearing the boots more like they were wearing me.

Hoping for a different experience, I purchased another pair of rain boots: the Balenciaga × Crocs collaboration boots. Crocs, originally known for their lightweight EVA material and affordability. After the collaboration with Balenciaga, its price has increased ten times compared to before. However, I bought this pair of boots without much thought because Kanye West had been frequently seen wearing them. That endorsement alone seemed to validate the purchase. However, functionally, the shoes were deeply flawed. Despite being sold as rain boots, the thick sole and texture made them slippery on wet surfaces. I've slipped and fallen many times while wearing it. On top of that they lacked breathability, trapping heat and moisture inside, my feet often felt wet from the inside even when no rain had touched them.



Balenciaga trooper



Balenciaga X Crocs



What makes us accept uncomfortable fashion products?

After experiencing these contradictions firsthand, I share my thoughts on social media. I describing the discomfort and impracticality of the Balenciaga boots. Many users agreed, sharing similar frustrations about the weight, stiffness, and lack of functionality. But there were also different reactions. While most of them admitted the boots were uncomfortable, they still insisted they were “worth it.” As long as they looked good, that was enough. Some even said, “You're wearing Balenciaga. If it's uncomfortable, maybe it's your problem cause this boots are design for taking photo not for walk.

Reading these comments, I felt a mix of amusement and disbelief. The idea that an item designed as footwear was no longer expected to fulfill the basic function of walking reflected a deeper distortion: when visual image entirely outweighs practical reality. what's equally troubling is the consumer response: instead of questioning the design, many people accept the discomfort as part of being fashionable. Comfort was no longer a requirement. Utility was no longer a question. As long as something looked impressive any flaw could be forgiven, even justified. My project will explore what makes people accept uncomfortable fashion product. I started thinking about how to express this situation visually. I decided to use a fable as my medium because fables naturally carry a sense of satire. I chose The Emperor's New Clothes because it perfectly matches the phenomenon I want to criticize.



mind map

This mind map captures an emotionally driven brainstorming session I conducted in the early stages of the project. At the time, I hadn't yet solidified a core direction—I was simply preoccupied with one persistent question: why is something considered fashionable even when it's uncomfortable to wear? I began breaking down this phenomenon from multiple angles: brand behavior, trend cycles, consumer psychology, the commodification of identity, emotional impact, and the cultural role of media.

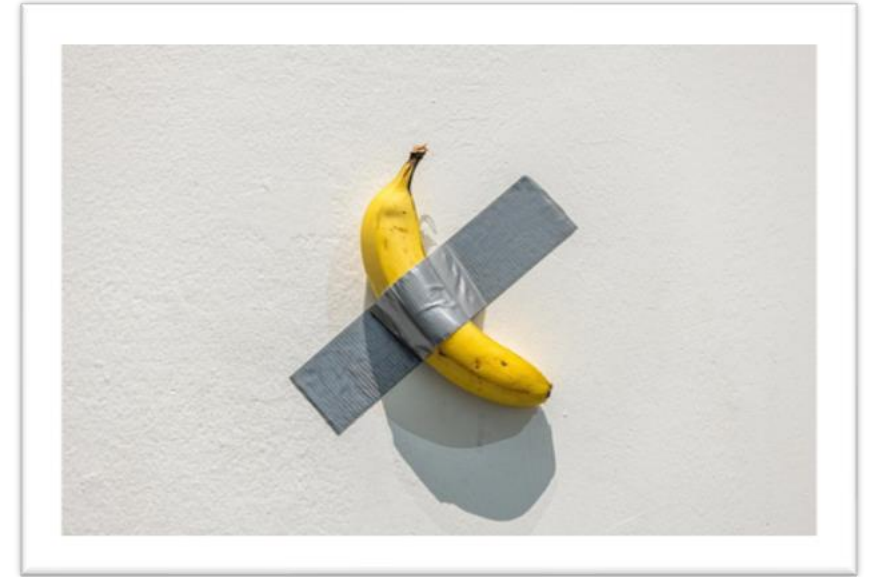


Comedian

I research Maurizio Cattelan's "Comedian" as an example of how ordinary objects can be turned into luxury symbols through storytelling and hype. The work is simply a banana taped to a wall, yet it was sold for over \$100,000 and later auctioned for \$6.2 million.

Cattelan did not hide the absurdity—in fact, he used it. By offering only a certificate and allowing the banana to be replaced anytime, he exposed how value in art depends more on belief than on material. To me, this work is not just about the art market. It's also a satire of how anything—even something useless or short-lived—can become a fashion item, if the story around it is strong enough.

In that sense, Cattelan is not selling a banana; he's selling the illusion of meaning. This is like how fashion brands can assign extreme value to something with no real function, just by framing it as exclusive, limited, or iconic. I see it as a modern version of the emperor's invisible clothes—**people admire what they are told to admire.**



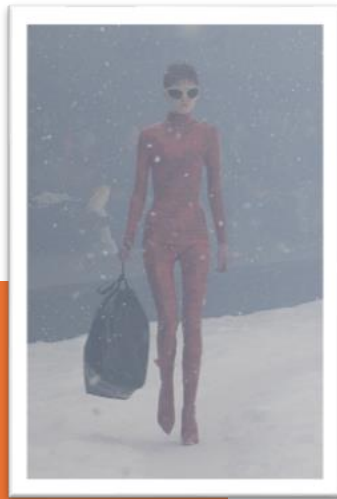
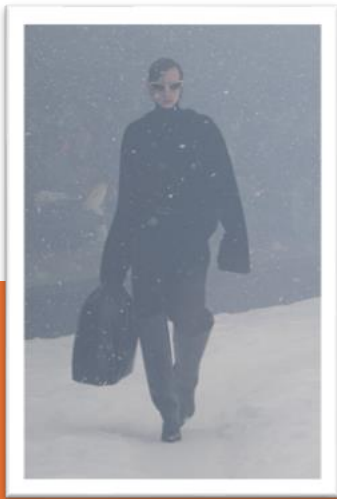
Title: Comedian
Year: 2019

Materials: A fresh banana and a strip of gray duct tape

Exhibition Venue: Art Basel Miami Beach, United States

Form: Conceptual art — the buyers received a certificate of authenticity and installation instructions, not the banana itself

How luxury brands build authority



Balenciaga Winter 2022



Everest 2015

I turn my focus to Balenciaga's Winter 2022 show. Much like the fable, this show constructs a symbolic narrative that seeks to replace functional reality with conceptual illusion.

Balenciaga Winter 22 is presented on an infinite white field, encapsulated with a protective glass screen. In this real-life 3-D live stream with a 360° view, we observe the idea of a season as we once knew it. Just as a souvenir snow globe preserves a memory, the impending present plays out within a manufactured storm, mapping past winters onto the next.

Balenciaga Winter 2022

In Balenciaga's Winter 22 show description, I find two key points which is not reasonable. The first one is the construction of a fully manufactured environment and the romanticization of environmental collapse. The artificial snowstorm, enclosed in glass, replaces real seasons with a staged simulation. However, the clothing presented on the runway—light dresses, slim silhouettes, minimal layering—does not reflect the harsh conditions such a storm would demand. *Instead of protection or functionality, the designs prioritize aesthetic expression, making the simulated crisis feel detached and ridiculous.* To highlight this contrast, I placed a still from Everest (2015) — a film based on real events where climbers face extreme blizzard conditions — next to Balenciaga's show looks. In the film, survival gear is heavy, layered, and designed for protection, making the difference clear: while real blizzards demand functional clothing, *Balenciaga's simulated storm reduces disaster to a purely visual styling device.* The audience collectively immersed themselves in the visual illusion, and no one questioned whether the "blizzard" was real.

EPHEA™

I also find out Balenciaga made the introduction of EPHEA™, to present itself as sustainable. EPHEA™ is a new mycelium-based material. While the material may represent an innovation, and it contributes to sustainable. However, there are some problems made its use is extremely limited.

Durability Issues

Compared to traditional animal leather, existing mycelium-based materials show weaker resistance to abrasion and tearing. They are prone to structural degradation under frequent use or in humid environments.

Scalability Issues

The cultivation and processing of mycelium materials currently require highly controlled environments, including specific temperature, humidity, and growth substrates. Production cycles are long, and batch consistency is difficult to maintain, making large-scale supply to the global market challenging.

Cost Efficiency Issues

The current production cost of mycelium materials is significantly higher than that of traditional leather or synthetic leather. This is primarily due to the complex biological cultivation processes, strict environmental controls, and labor-intensive post-processing.

Although EPHEA™ was introduced at Balenciaga's Winter 2022 show as a breakthrough material, my research shows that it faces major limitations in durability, scalability, and cost-efficiency, making it unsuitable for large-scale production. **Instead of offering a practical solution, EPHEA™ mainly serves as a symbol of innovation and environmental responsibility, helping the brand project an image of sustainability without fundamentally changing its production model.** Like the emperor's invisible clothes, it creates the appearance of progress while leaving the underlying system intact. Its value lies less in real material impact and more in reinforcing the brand's reputation for being forward-thinking and socially conscious.



How luxury brands build authority

Luxury Rebranding

Luxury brands build their authority through create a story, If an ordinary product is to be sold at a high price, it needs to be framed with a story that grants it authority. **One common method of establishing authority is by branding an ordinary object as luxury.** These objects don't change much in form or function. What changes is the narrative built around them. The brand gives them an exclusivity and that story makes the price seem justifiable. The design itself doesn't carry the value, the story does.



A garbage bag becomes the Balenciaga Trash Pouch, priced at \$1,790. It still looks like a garbage bag, but after combine the brand, it presents as a piece of performance fashion.



A worker's jacket, once used for manual labor, becomes a luxury outerwear piece — reframed as “industrial chic.”



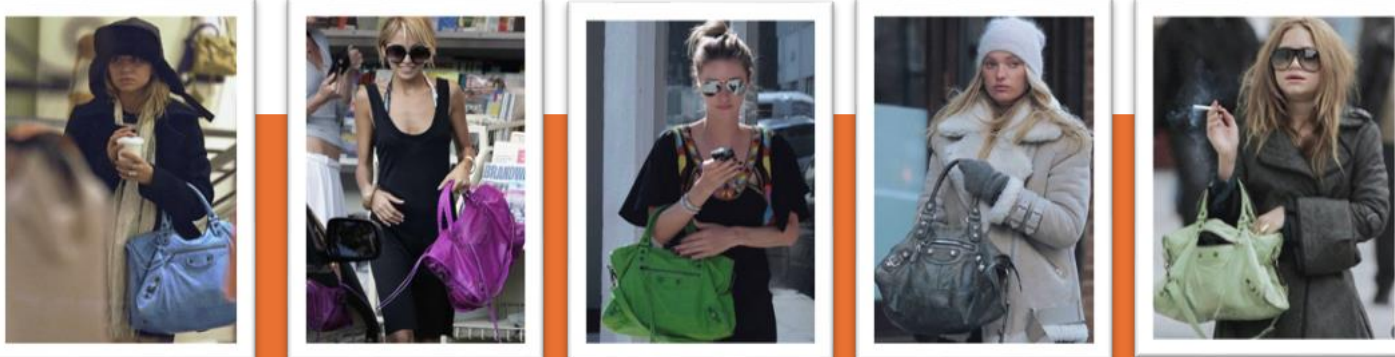
An IKEA shopping bag, originally under one dollar, is turned into the Balenciaga Arena Tote, priced at over \$2,000. With almost the same look, it is rebranded as a “statement piece” through irony and logo alone.



Tiffany's lock bracelet, which resembles a steel wire or chain, is sold as a symbol of “urban edge” and “minimalist elegance.”



How luxury brands build authority



After brands create a story and redefine a product, they still need people to believe in that story. This is where celebrity influence becomes crucial. Celebrities act as living proof that the story is real — that the product stands for success, uniqueness, or cultural relevance. In my own experience, I first bought Balenciaga's Trooper boots not because I found them practical, but because I saw Kanye West wearing them. At that moment, I wasn't just buying a pair of shoes — I was buying into an image he represented. Celebrity endorsement doesn't just sell a product. It sells belonging, aspiration, and validation. It makes the discomfort feel worth it, and the impracticality feel desirable.

Celebrity Influence

When people see celebrities wearing a product, it can increase their interest — not because they want to connect with the celebrity, but because they want to connect with others who also like that product. Wearing a popular item creates shared topics and a sense of belonging within certain social groups. In this way, fashion becomes a tool for social bonding, not just personal taste.



After examining these cases—from overpriced objects and performative materials to symbolic runways—I began to notice a consistent logic behind them. These products are not merely about function or form, but about belief. People buy into stories, into status signals, into illusions reinforced by design and branding. But why are such illusions so easily accepted, even when they contradict practicality and comfort?

To better understand this mechanism, I turned to the fable *The Emperor's New Clothes*. In that story, power is not defined by reality, but by the perception constructed around it. This timeless structure offers a powerful lens through which to view the fashion system. In the next section, I will explore how this fable maps onto modern fashion, and how brands, consumers, and narratives collectively sustain the illusion.

Fable research



Legitimacy of birth → Intelligence and competence

A marginalized figure → An innocent child

Critique of rigid class hierarchy → Exposing collective illusion

I found out that The Emperor's New Clothes wasn't originally Andersen's story. It actually came from a much older Spanish version where the invisible clothes were used to test people's birth status — only those born "legitimately" could supposedly see them. Back then, it was all about keeping strict hierarchies in place. The one who told the truth wasn't a noble or a leader, but someone from the margins of society — someone with nothing to lose.

When Andersen rewrote it, he changed the rule. Now, only the smart and capable could see the clothes. I think this change is crucial. In the past, your identity was fixed — you were either born important or not. But by the 19th century, people were judged more by things like intelligence or competence. And those things are invisible, vague, and hard to prove. That made the fear even deeper. People stayed silent not because of who they were, but because they were afraid of what others might think they lacked. Andersen also replaced the truth-teller with a child — not someone excluded, but someone innocent. That completely changed the feeling of the story. It wasn't just about lies anymore, but about who dares to break an illusion when everyone else plays along.

That's exactly what I see happening in fashion industry now — image over reality. That's why I chose this fable as my narrative media. It's simple, but it hits the core of what I want to say.



Visual Analysis: Vilhelm Pedersen's The Emperor's New Clothes



Thomas Vilhelm Pedersen (28 January 1820 – 13 March 1859) was a Danish painter and illustrator who is known for his illustrations for fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen. He was the first artist to illustrate Andersen's works. His drawings were converted into wood prints and used in the Danish and German editions.

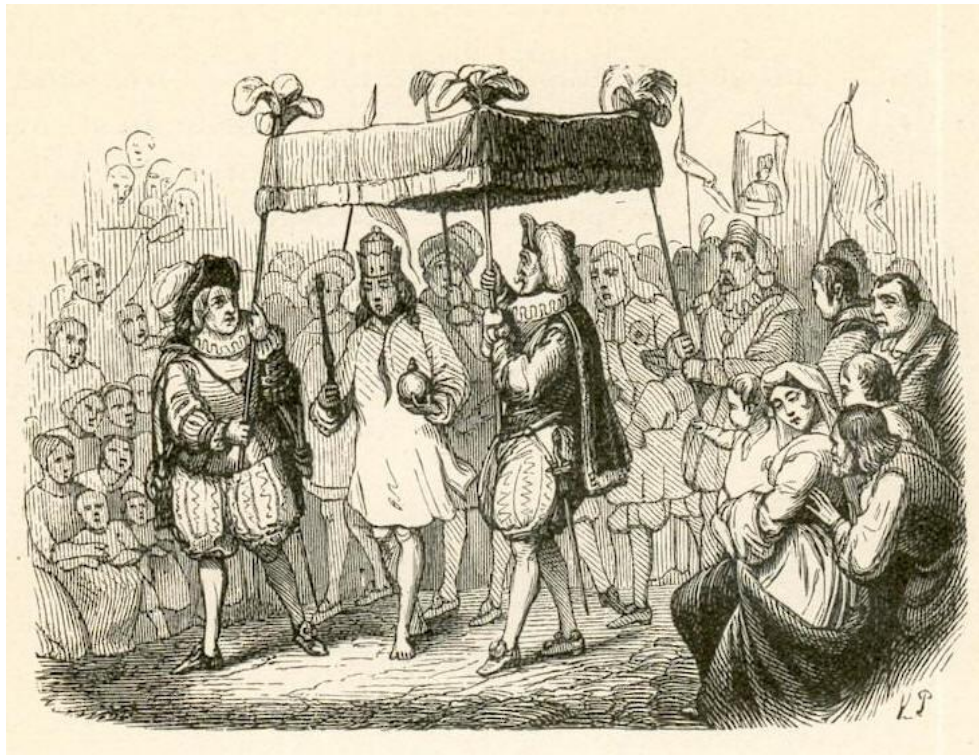
Drawing Technique

Pedersen uses a classic 19th-century European black-and-white woodcut style, where fine lines create a strong sense of depth and detail. The figures are clearly outlined, while the inner areas—such as clothing folds and facial features—are carefully rendered with thin lines to suggest volume and realism. Shadows are formed by varying line density, especially in the canopy and background crowd, which helps the central character visually stand out.

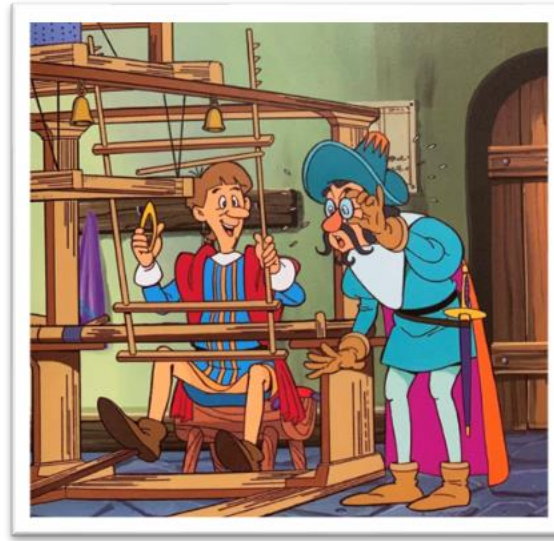
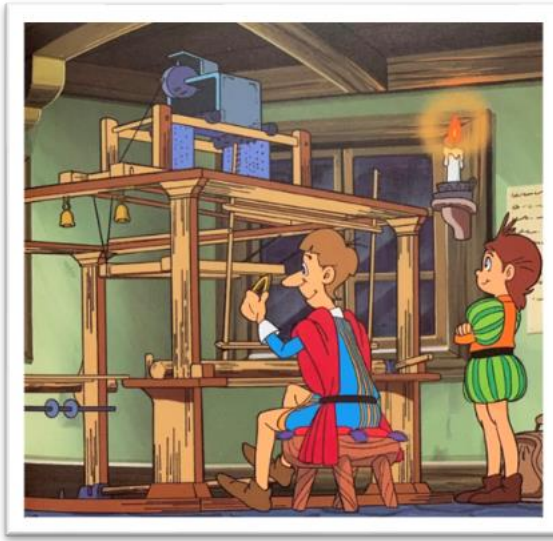
Composition

The emperor is centrally placed, with two attendants holding the canopy to form a balanced, pillar-like structure. He is surrounded by onlookers—seated figures on the right and standing ones on the left—creating a sense of visual pressure. The composition shows clear depth, with the foreground (ground and seated figures), middle ground (emperor and attendants), and background (dense crowd) forming a layered space.

Pedersen's illustration showed me how simple visuals can express complex ideas. The emperor looks confident but exposed, and the people around him stay silent. This helped me think about how to show social pressure and illusion in my own project. I learned how body language and group composition can tell a deeper story.



Another artist's work



This picture book adaptation of The Emperor's New Clothes was directed by Japanese writer [Shogo Hirata](#) in 1993. I was immediately drawn to its clean lines, bright colors, and vivid character expressions. I appreciate how the illustrations create a clear and lively storytelling atmosphere. In my future work, I plan to learn from its approach to composition and color use to improve the clarity and emotional impact of my own visual narratives.

Main characters Personality Deep Analysis



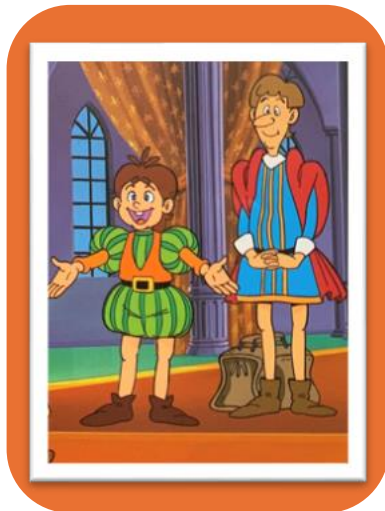
Emperor-Luxury conglomerates

Attention Seeking:

The emperor was obsessed with dressing up, changing outfits every hour just to show off. He treated appearance as his primary source of value, showing an extreme dependence on external attention. His personality heavily relied on external symbols to sustain his identity.

Self-delusion:

When swindlers told him that "only smart people can see it", he knew that he couldn't see it, but in order to avoid admitting his incompetence, he chose to believe that he saw it. He deeply feared any threat to his image of authority, revealing an extremely fragile sense of identity.



Swindlers-advertising agencies

Strong manipulative desire:

They precisely target the emperor's fear of losing face, fully aware of this psychological weakness. They gain benefits through language manipulation without any real output.

Masters of cognitive deception:

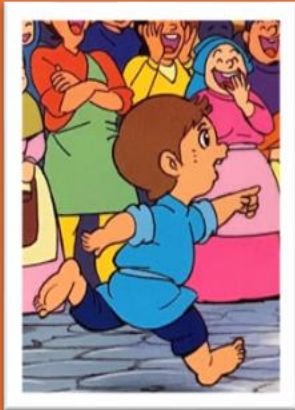
They understand that reality is irrelevant—the key lies in shaping collective perception; if everyone believes it, then it becomes "truth."

Cold-blooded pragmatists:

They feel no moral conflict about their actions; their sole concern is maximizing manipulation and profit.



Officials and The Crowd-Fashion critics and general consumers



The child-A few independent critics

- Herd mentality: Fearful of deviating from the majority perception, they chose to conform even when internally doubtful.
- Social fear: Terrified of being labeled "incompetent," "stupid," or "unworthy," they suppressed their honest judgment.
- Self-justification: Even when sensing something was wrong, they forced themselves to believe, "If everyone else says it's right, then the problem must be with me."
-

- Instinctual truthfulness: The child, unshaped by social norms and relying purely on direct sensory perception, can express the truth instinctively without fear or self-censorship.

Fables reflect reality

The core of *The Emperor's New Clothes* is about the construction of authority, the power of collective illusion, and the human tendency toward conformity and self-deception. These dynamics are equally visible in the fashion industry today. Luxury brands and fashion conglomerates construct symbolic authority through narratives, logos, and status markers. Consumers, driven by conformity and the fear of appearing ignorant or "out of touch," often participate in sustaining illusions where image outweighs practicality, and value is fabricated rather than inherent. Even when brand executives recognize the emptiness behind certain products, they must continue to uphold the illusion to maintain market dominance.

Research summary

My project began with a personal experience — wearing a pair of designer boots that looked impressive but felt extremely uncomfortable. This led me to ask a central question: why are we willing to accept fashion that causes discomfort? To explore this, I looked into public reactions and noticed a widespread obedience to brand authority, which reminded me of The Emperor's New Clothes. Using the structure of that fable, I examined how modern fashion brands construct symbolic power — through visual design, material storytelling, product rebranding, celebrity influence, and social identity. Step by step, I unpacked how the fashion system creates illusions that make people willingly pay for things that don't serve their basic needs. Next, I will use 3D modeling to recreate each character and build a scene that reflects this absurd system. This fictional space will help me visualize how fashion creates illusions through roles and symbols.

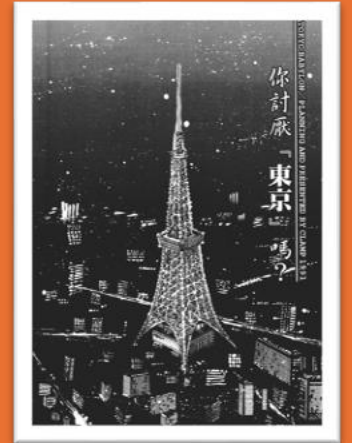
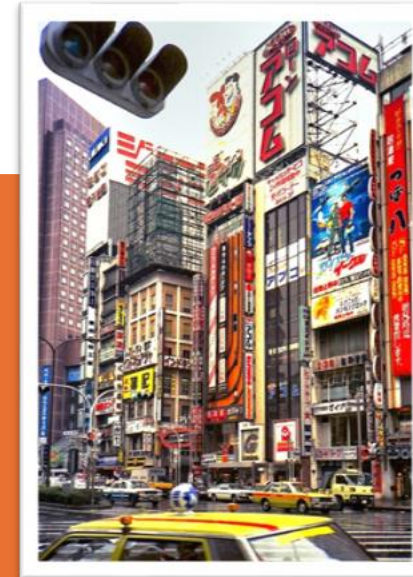
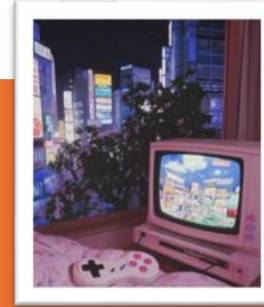
Initial sketches

Illusion on Display



This is a set of early sketches that outlines the basic narrative structure of the project. In the story, the emperor is about to reveal a new fashion product. On the day of the event, the item has already been stolen, leaving the platform empty. However, the audience does not notice anything wrong. They continue to take photos and applaud, believing the empty display is part of the intended artwork. The story draws from *The Emperor's New Clothes* and reflects how people today often follow visual symbols and brand messaging without questioning what is actually being shown.

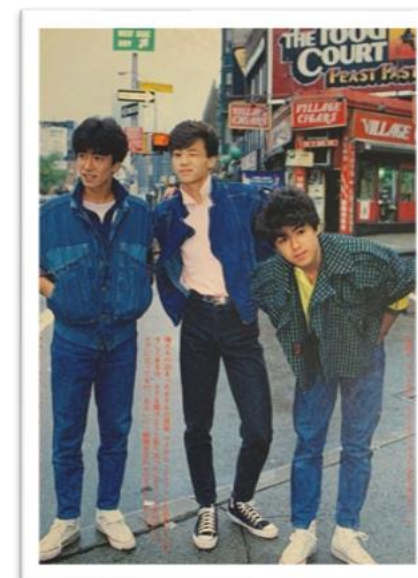
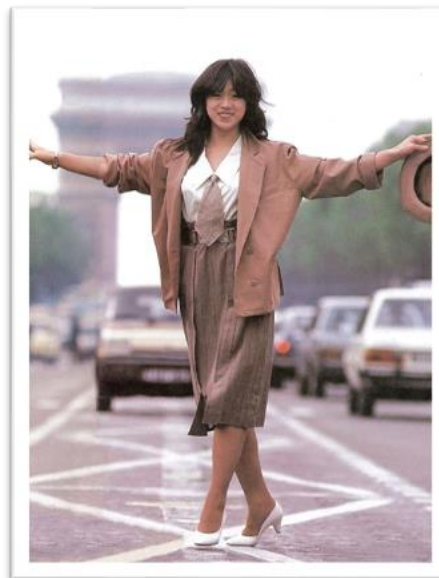
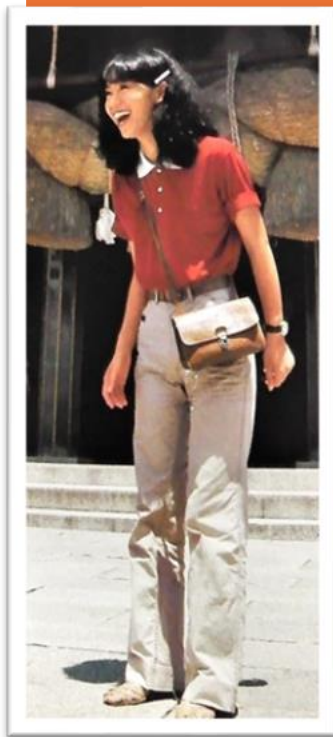
Japanese asset price bubble period 1980-1990



I want to give my work a specific historical background to make it more visual. I chose Japan during the bubble economy period in the late 1980s to early 1990s because it was a time when consumerism, luxury branding, and exaggerated visual culture were at their peak. People were deeply drawn to surface beauty, material excess, and optimistic illusions of wealth. To reflect this atmosphere, I will incorporate elements from that time into my design, such as decorative commercial architecture, large advertisement panels, and neon lights. These additions will support the themes of illusion, desire, and blind admiration in my project.



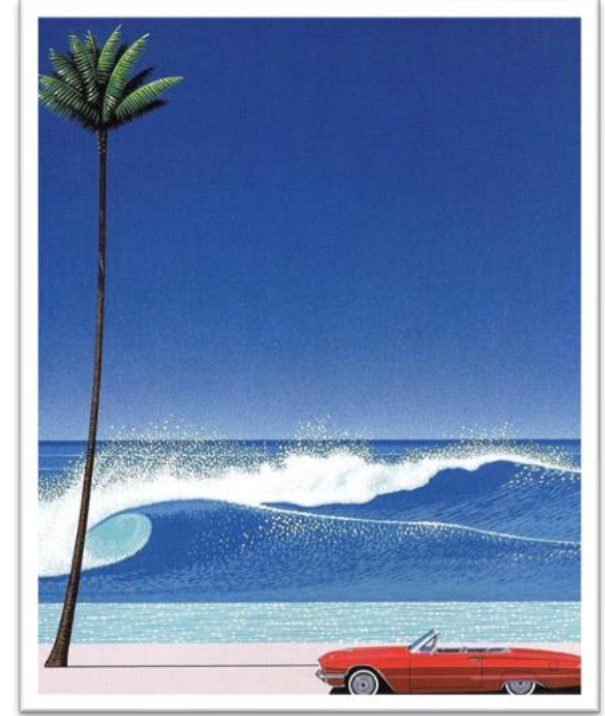
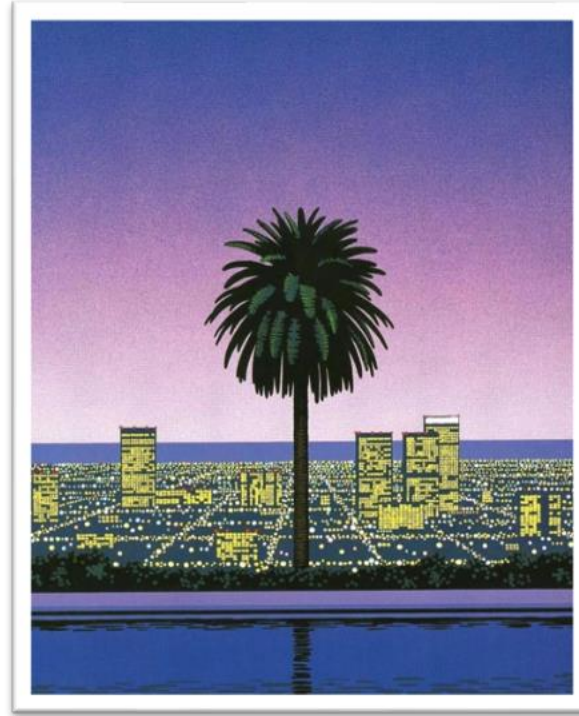
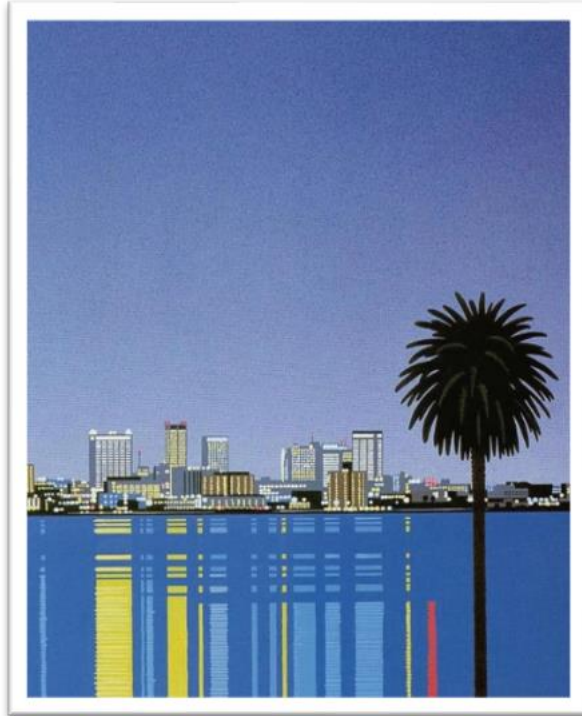
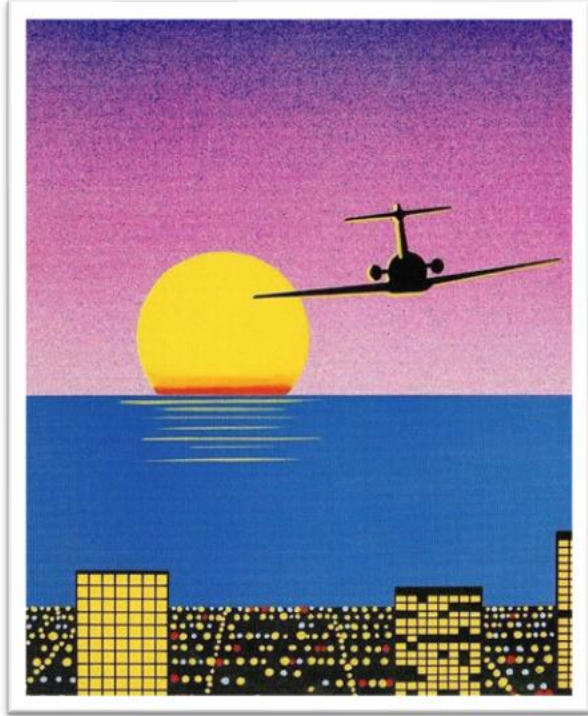
Japanese fashion in the 1980s to 1990s



Fashion in Japan during the 1980s to 1990s reflected the country's booming economy and growing appetite for individual expression. The clothing style was diverse, combining Western influences with local trends. Key features included high-waisted pants, oversized jackets, bold patterns, denim-on-denim looks, and colorful layering. Both men and women experimented with silhouettes and accessories, and many embraced a polished but playful urban aesthetic. This era's fashion captured a sense of optimism, excess, and visual boldness that matches the spirit of the bubble economy period.

Japanese artwork in the 1980s to 1990s

City pop



Hiroshi Nagai

City Pop is a style of pop music that emerged in Japan in the late 1970s to 1980s. It blends Western funk, soft rock, and disco, and often reflects an idealized vision of urban life—summer, beaches, romance, and consumer pleasure. Visually, the style features bright colors, neon lights, palm trees, sports cars, and sunsets, often captured in the artwork of Hiroshi Nagai. This dreamy and nostalgic aesthetic became a symbol of the optimism and surface glamour of Japan's bubble economy, just before its collapse. I plan to reference this style in my project's background to highlight themes of fantasy, illusion, and desire.

Fashion toys

With this consumer-driven and illusion-filled era as the backdrop, I chose fashion toys as my main medium to reflect how people chase image and identity through symbolic objects. The value of fashion toys comes from branding, visual identity, and limited editions. This fits my project theme, which asks why people are willing to follow uncomfortable fashion for the sake of image and recognition.



kaws

Characteristic:
X-shaped eyes, rigid standing pose, crossed arms, cartoon-like skeletal structure.



Takashi Murakami

Characteristic:
Five-petal smiling flowers, flat graphic patterns, densely arranged bright colors.



Jeff Koons

Characteristic:
Metallic mirror finish, balloon animal shapes, large-scale sculpture proportions.

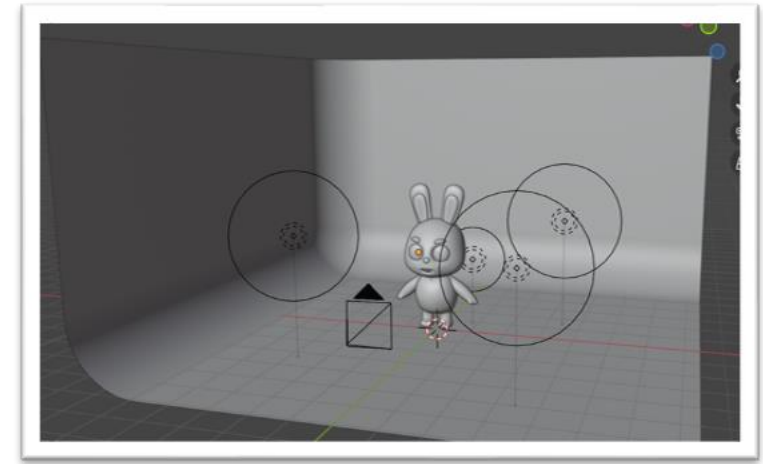
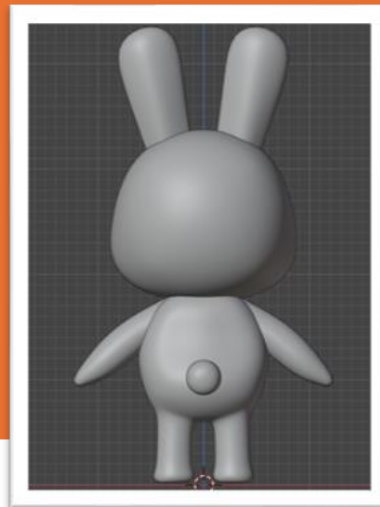
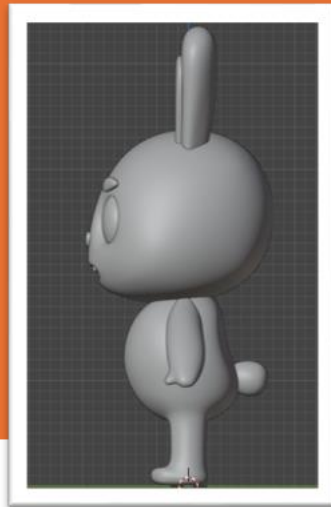
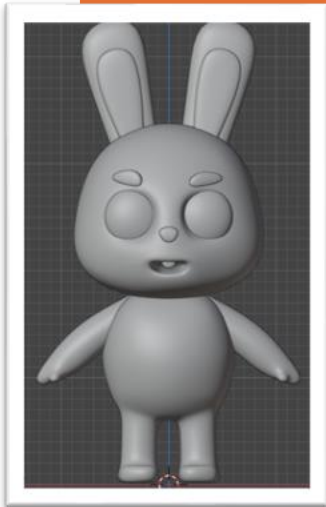
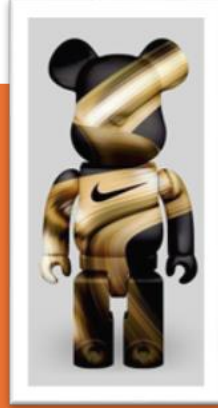


Bearbrick

Characteristic:
Fixed bear-shaped silhouette, square head with round ears, interchangeable surface prints.

These designer toys all highlight one thing: a strong, recognizable form that stays constant, while meaning is added through surface, branding, or repetition. Whether it's the fixed pose of KAWS figures, the repeated smiling faces in Murakami's work, the mirror finish of Koons sculptures, or Bearbrick's unchanging bear body, each example shows how collectability is built on visual identity and symbolic attachment.

Fashion toy design

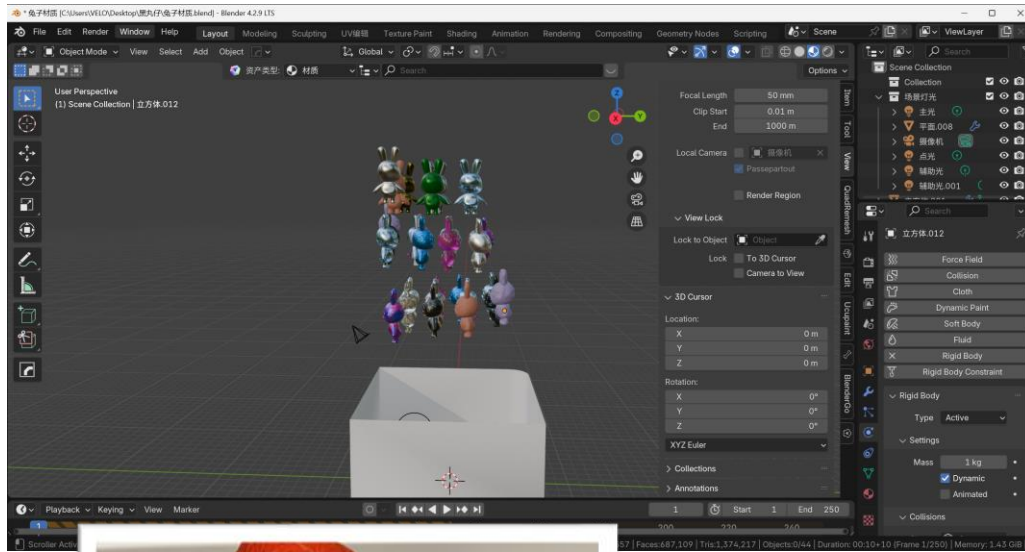


I created my own fashion toy model inspired by the style of Bearbrick, and I chose a rabbit as the base character. Before finalizing my current direction, I considered using the fable The Tortoise and the Hare as a metaphor. In this idea, the rabbit represented fast fashion, which changes quickly and often focuses on surface, while the tortoise stood for slow fashion, which moves steadily and values durability. However, after researching the original story, I realized that the fable was mainly about arrogance and underestimation, not about speed or consumption. Applying it directly to fashion felt forced and off-topic. I eventually set this concept aside. However, the image of the rabbit remained. That is why I chose a rabbit rather than another animal. It carries a visual memory of this earlier idea.

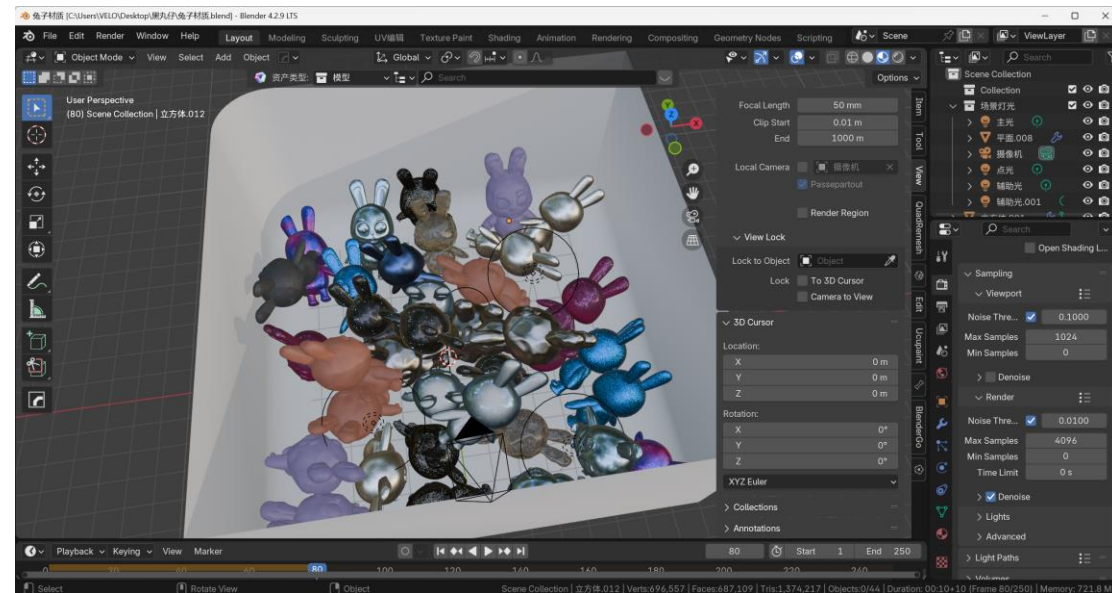
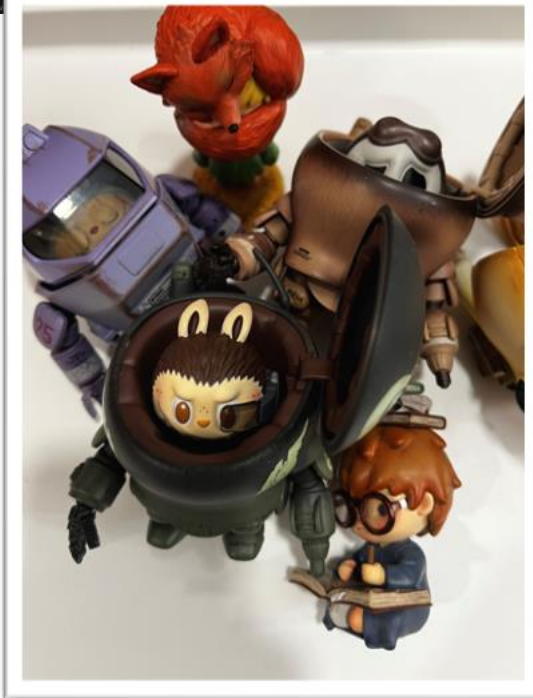
The Replication and Mutation of Symbols

Like Bearbrick, it keeps a fixed body shape and only changes in surface design. I used the same approach by changing materials and textures instead of form. These material experiments may not be used in the final work, but they are a valuable part of the development process.





This page documents the initial inspiration and digital execution of the toy-pile scene. The idea came unintentionally while I was casually stacking up some collectible toys. I found the chaotic but visually rich composition interesting, and it reminded me of how consumer products—despite being mass-produced—are often treated as unique when visually reframed. I decided to recreate this effect in Blender using rigid body physics, applying different materials and surface treatments to a single rabbit model to emphasize illusory variety. This experiment helped reinforce my critique on the superficial differentiation in fashion and collectible culture.



POP MART



Molly



Hirono



Labubu



Dimoo

Pop Mart was founded in 2010 as a small lifestyle store in Beijing. In 2014, it started selling blind box toys with the Japanese brand Sonny Angel, which became popular. After failing to secure the IP, Pop Mart realized the need to create its own characters. In 2016, it launched its first original IP, Molly, with artist Kenny Wong. This marked its move into fashion toys. Later, it developed more popular IPs like Dimoo, Labubu. These characters share a fixed body shape but change through themed series and special editions.



Labubu x Luffy



Labubu x Coca-Cola

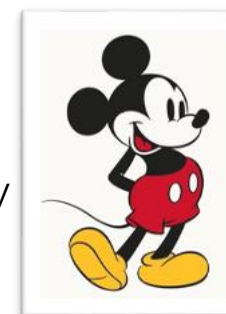


Hirono x The Little Prince

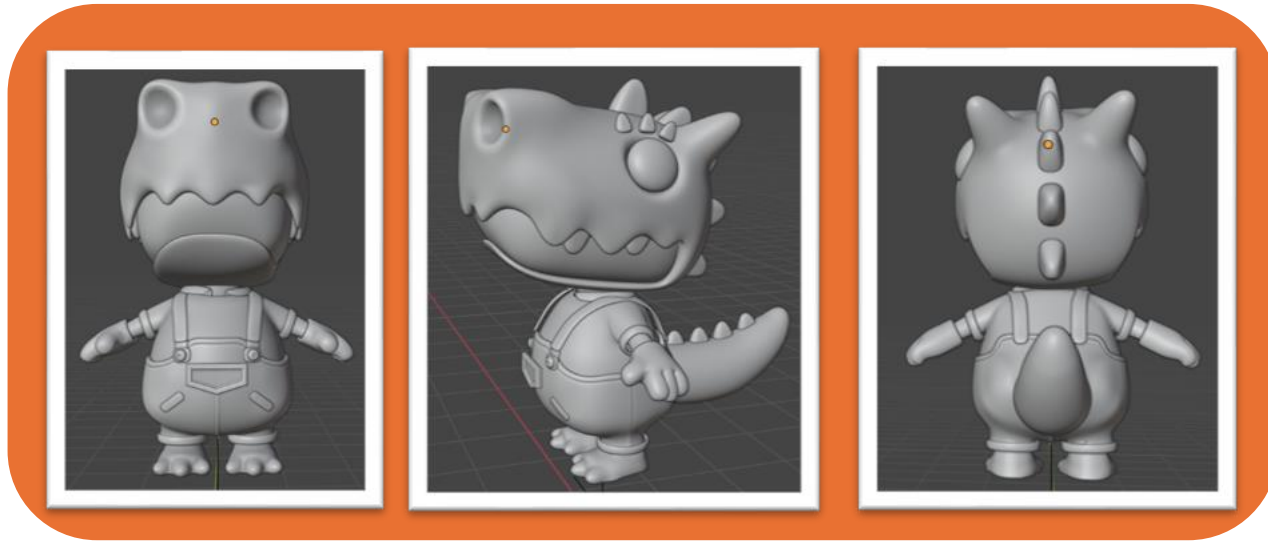


Dimoo/ Molly x Disney

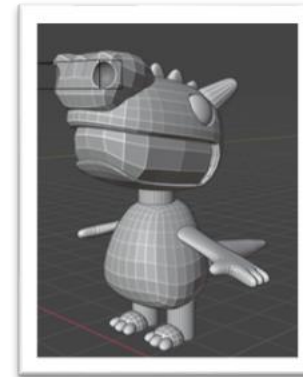
Pop Mart tells stories through collaboration. Instead of detailed backstories, it connects its IPs with major brands like Disney, One Piece, and Coca-Cola. Crossovers like Space Molly x Mickey not only give the figures new meaning and wider appeal but also raise their market value. This strategy boosts brand image and creates high perceived value, allowing the toys to sell at a premium.



A more complex fashion toy dinosaur



After creating a basic character like the rabbit figure, I began exploring how to give my design more potential for expansion and branding. I looked to one of my favorite toy IPs, Labubu, as a key reference. What makes Labubu unique is its ability to wear a wide range of outfits while keeping its core shape and identity. This flexibility allows it to collaborate with various brands and themes, making it highly adaptable for licensing and seasonal releases. Inspired by that approach, I designed this dinosaur toy with recognizable clothing elements and distinct character features, aiming to give it both a strong visual identity and the potential for future cross-brand collaborations.



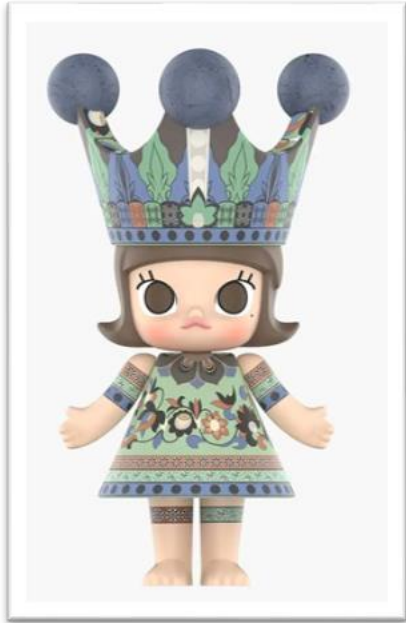
clay material style experiment

In this part of the project, I explored a clay-like material style for the toy figure. The inspiration came from stop-motion animations like Shaun the Sheep, which often preserve handmade details such as uneven surfaces, soft edges, and matte lighting.



This material treatment gives the character a warmer and more approachable look, while also echoing the handcrafted and collectible nature often found in fashion toys. It was an experiment in style after digital modeling, aiming to expand the visual language of the figure.

The character design



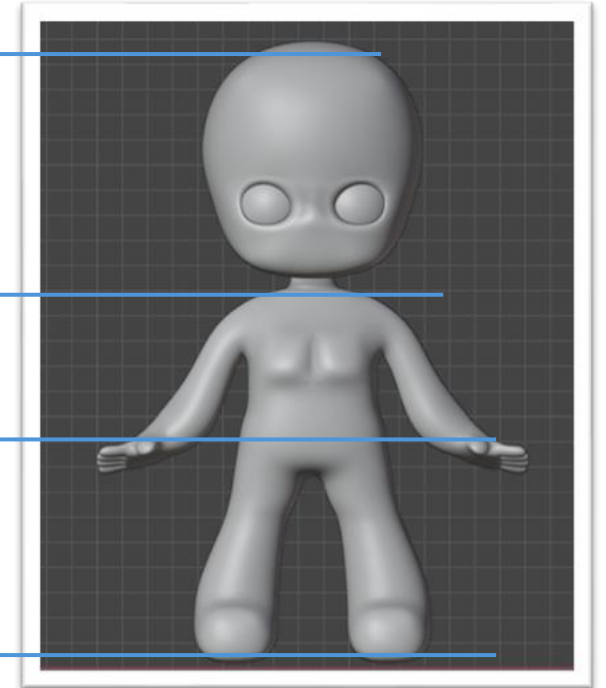
Royal Molly



Molly x Warner Bros.
100th Anniversary Series

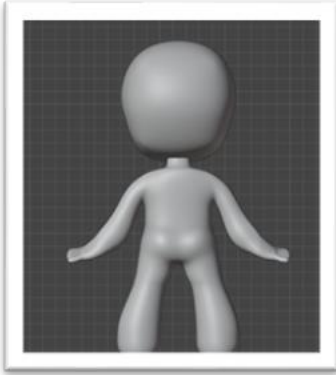
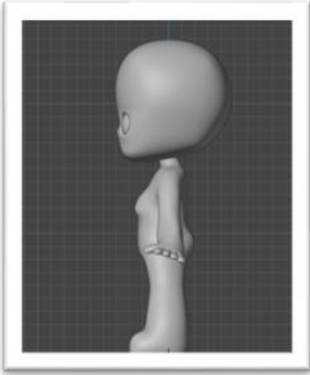
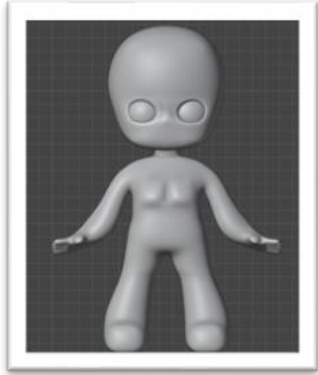


MOLLY BOB & TIM
Action Figure

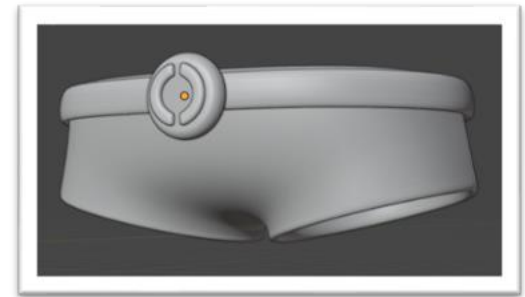
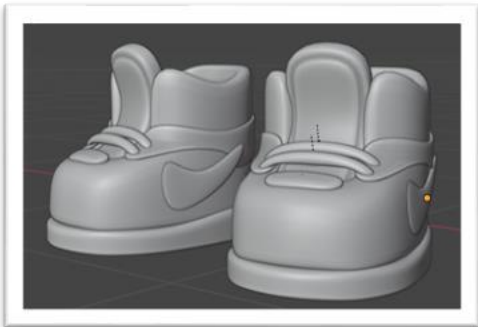
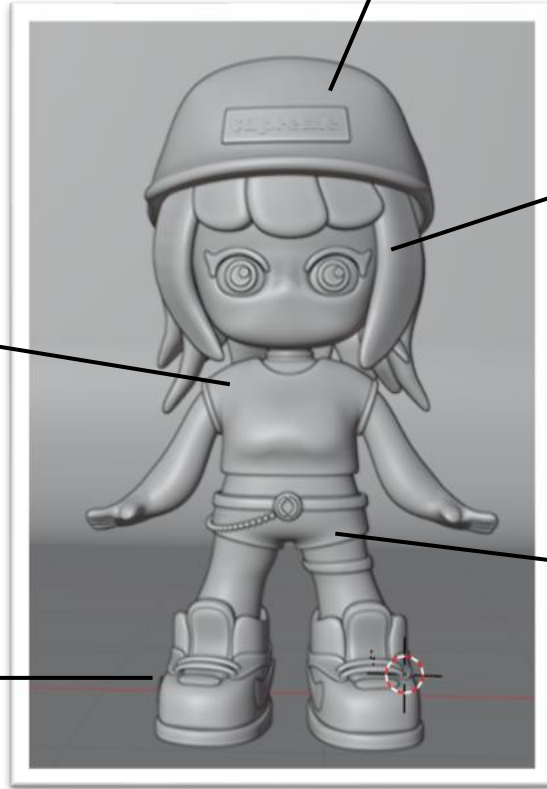
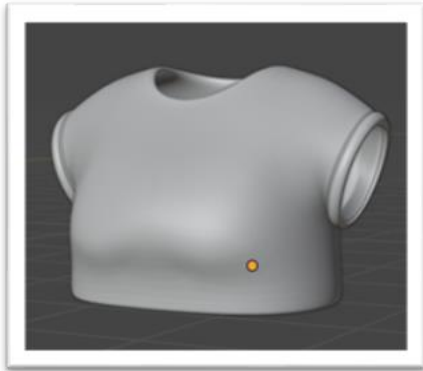


I began my character design with inspiration from the Molly series by Pop Mart. These figures share a distinct and consistent visual style. The head-to-body ratio is around 1:1.5 to 1:2, with the oversized head drawing immediate attention and enhancing cuteness and recognizability. The eyes are extremely large, taking up nearly one-third of the face and positioned centrally, often lacking emotional expression—this gives the figure a doll-like, neutral appearance. The limbs are short and thick, with stiff poses and simplified hands—usually rounded or mitten-shaped—emphasizing display over function. While costumes and themes vary, the underlying body structure remains almost identical, reinforcing visual consistency.

The character design

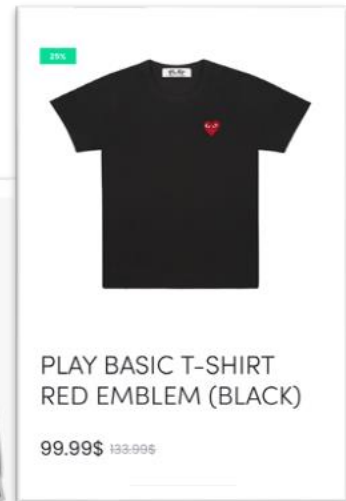
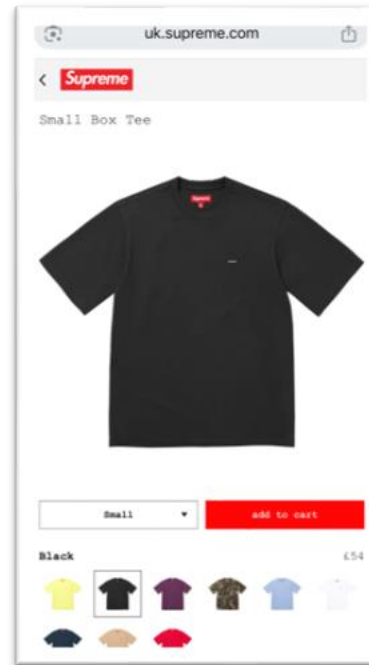


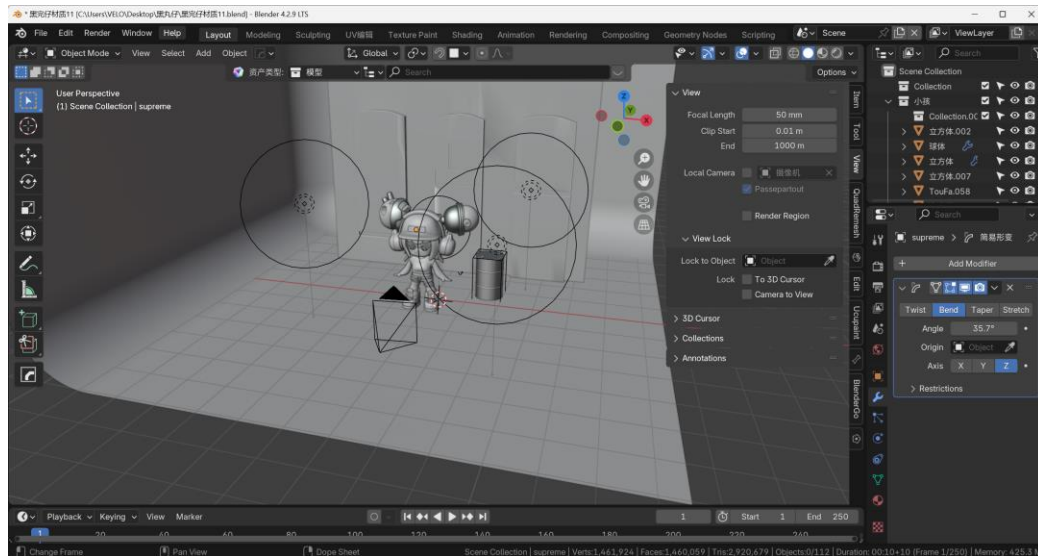
Three-View Diagram



The character design

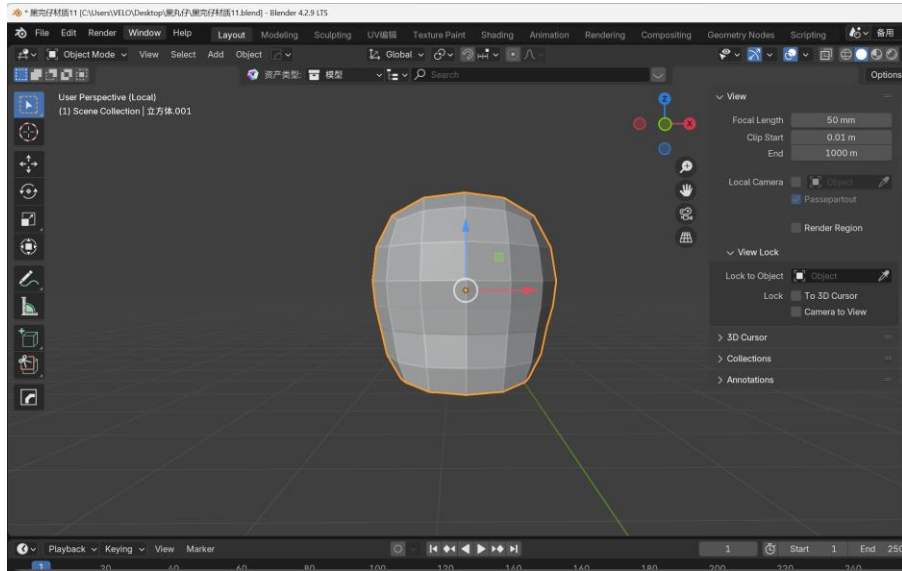
This character uses POP MART-style proportions, with a large head and short limbs. I included logos like Supreme and CDG not to celebrate them but to critique their symbolic role in fashion. While these brands had cultural significance in the past, they have now become examples of surface-driven fashion. Value is created not through design but through the presence of a recognizable label. These choices reflect how fashion today often relies on symbols and illusion rather than function or originality.

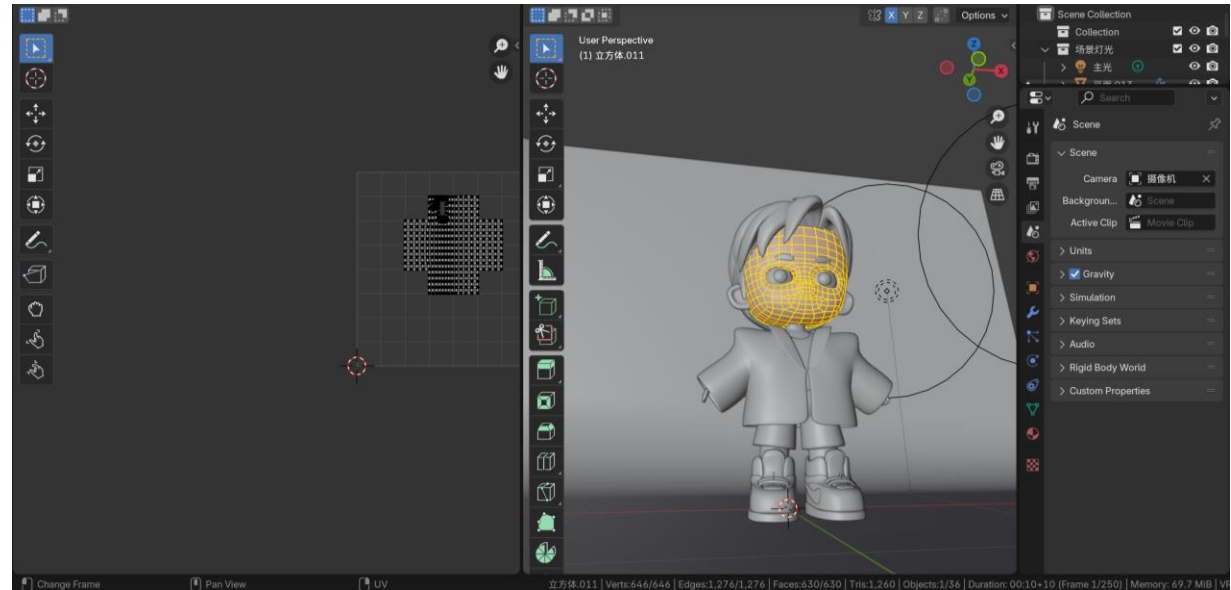
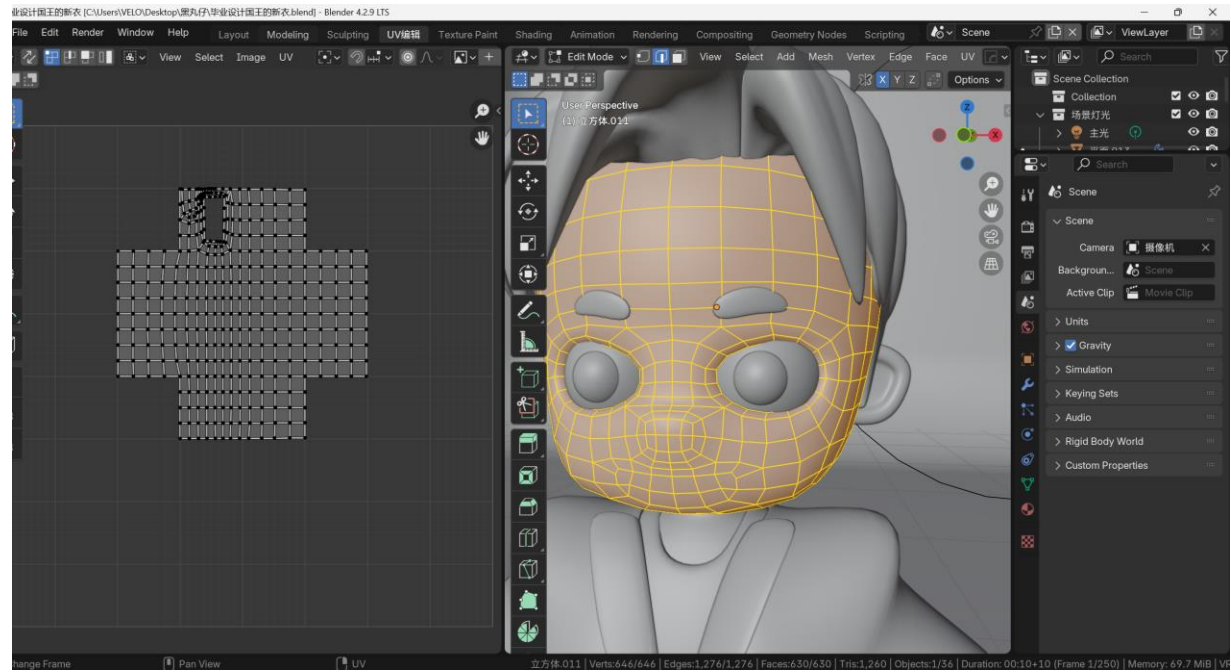


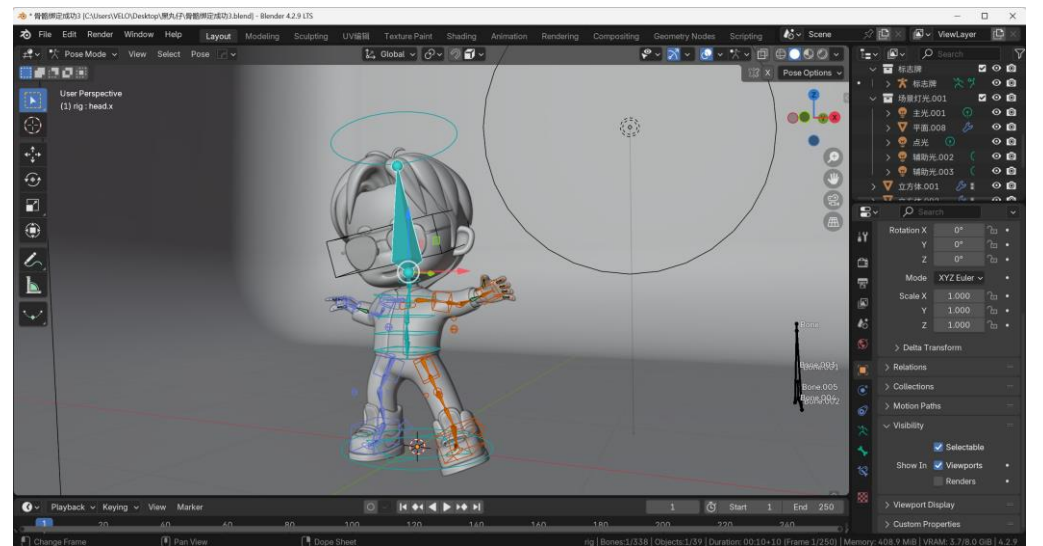
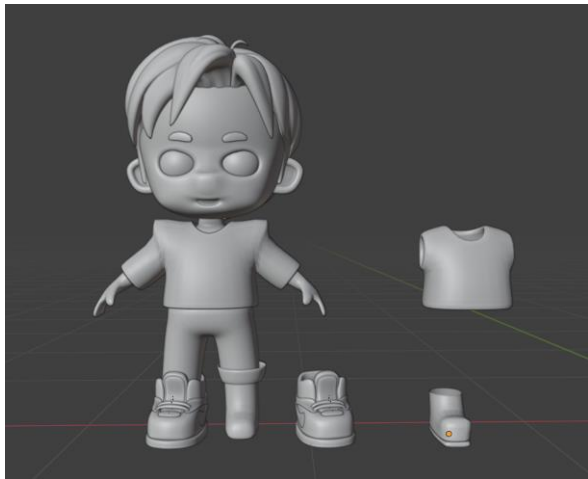
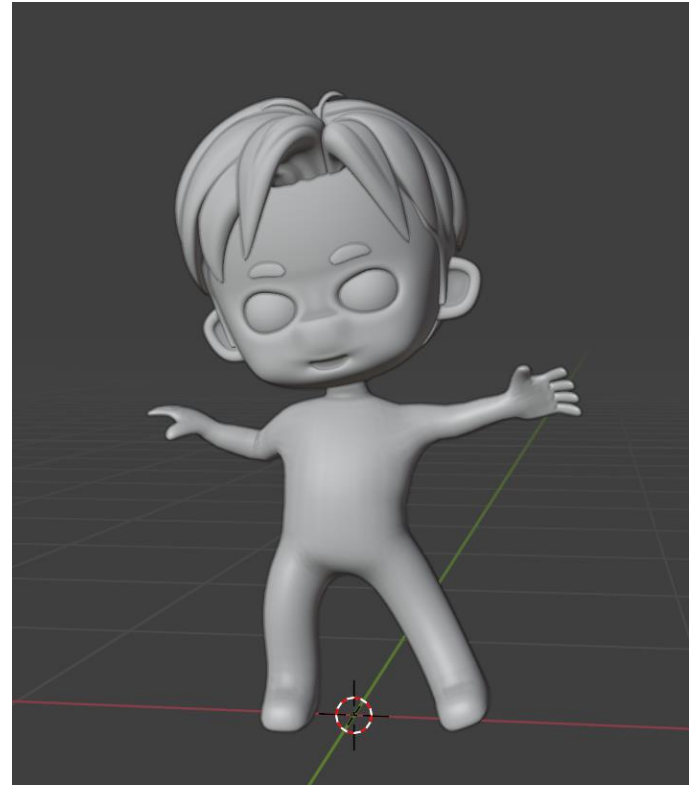


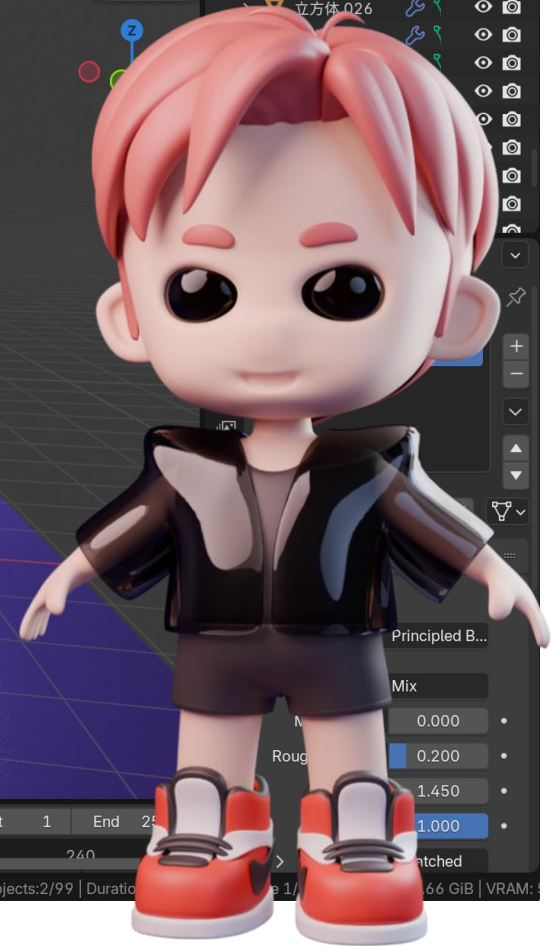
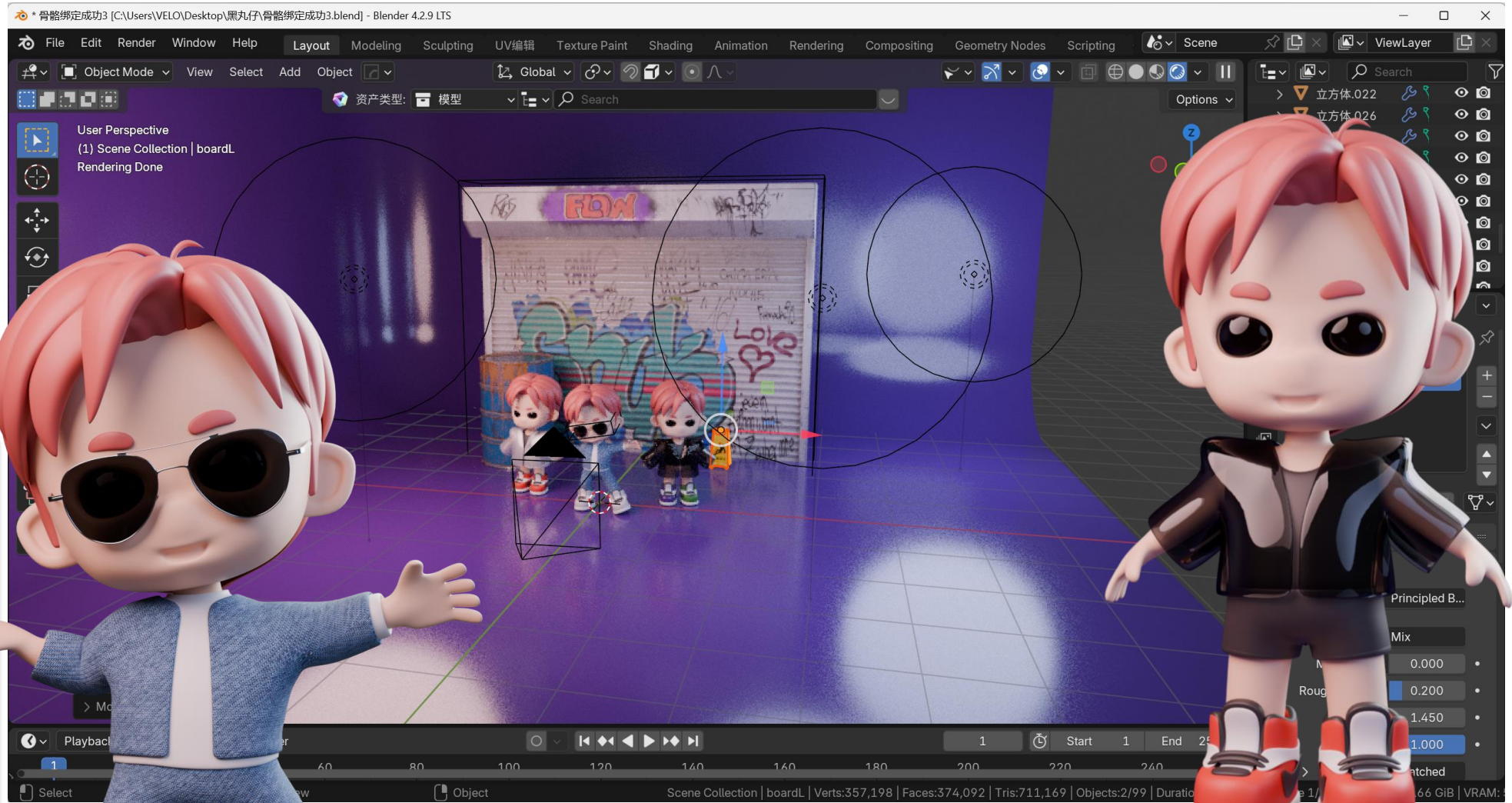
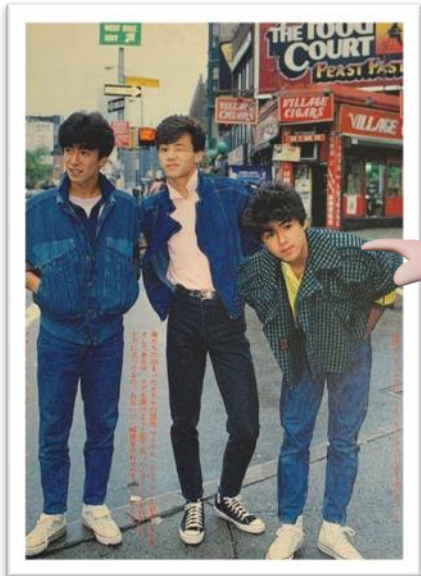
Although brands like CDG and Supreme do not strictly belong to Japan's 1980s bubble era, I chose to incorporate their logos intentionally. These two brands represent how fashion today often detaches value from function — turning any object into a “statement” by simply placing a logo on it. In that sense, they are not just design elements, but symbols of branding as belief. Their presence in my project reinforces the idea that the fashion system relies not on product utility, but on visual authority.

The second character design



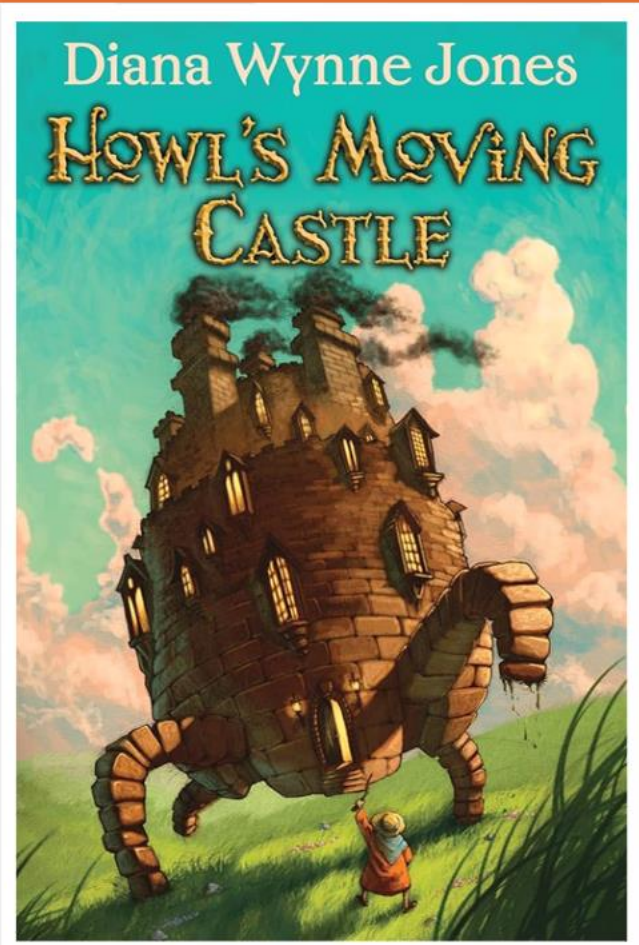






The outfit design draws inspiration from 1980s Japanese street fashion, particularly the all-denim look that emphasizes material consistency and strong silhouette cohesion. The transparent outfit on the right explores the idea of visibility and illusion, echoing the project's core theme of appearance versus reality in fashion.

Howl's Moving Castle



Howl's Moving Castle is a fantasy novel by Diana Wynne Jones, published in 1986. The story follows Sophie, a girl who is turned into an old woman by a witch's curse. She enters the moving castle of the wizard Howl and becomes involved in his unusual household and travels. The original cover shows the castle with a round base, several tower-like extensions, and four mechanical legs. The structure is composed of stacked parts that resemble bricks, turrets, and pipes. The image uses a low-angle perspective, placing the viewer below the castle. This makes the vertical composition more prominent. A small figure stands in the foreground, aligned with the center of the base, reinforcing scale and orientation. The background contains evenly spaced clouds, forming a gradient that separates the ground, the structure, and the sky into clear layers. The overall layout is symmetrical and stable, despite the irregular form of the castle.

The illustrated castle gave me the idea to build a stage for the emperor that is not static but mobile. Its tall, elevated form places the figure above the ground, creating a clear separation between the ruler and the crowd. I saw this as a way to visualize how authority in fashion can be elevated and detached from reality.

Artist Research



Hayao Miyazaki

Howl's Moving Castle was adapted into a film by Hayao Miyazaki in 2004. The idea of a moving, changing, and layered structure inspired me a lot.

In the film, the castle is a space that hides the main character and travels across landscapes. It is built from different parts, like pipes, windows, towers, and legs. They may not be logical, but they are full of symbols and visual impact.



Alariko

This illustration was created by Alariko and clearly references the visual style of Hayao Miyazaki.

Composition Analysis:

Low-angle perspective:

The viewpoint is placed at the bottom of the grassy slope, giving the robotic structure a sense of pressure and authority. It also emphasizes the contrast between the small figure and the large structure.

Right-shifted central composition:

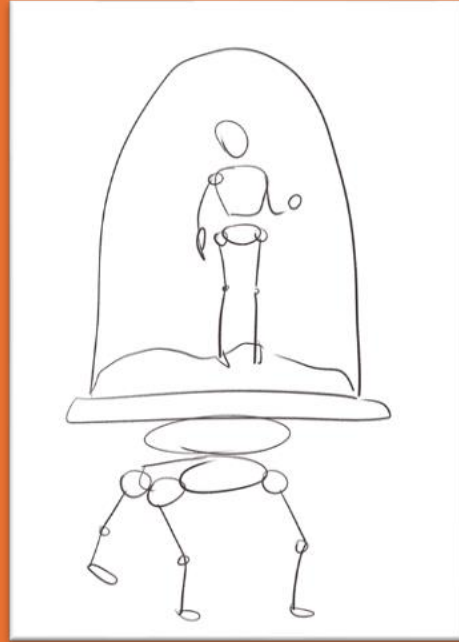
The main subject (the robot) is positioned slightly to the right. The clouds on the left side provide visual balance and prevent the composition from feeling too heavy on one side.

Miyazaki's design is built from a chaotic mix of pipes, chimneys, houses, and mechanical parts. It presents a living machine full of irregular detail, emphasizing motion, complexity, and an organic sense of disorder. In contrast, Alariko's design is much more simplified and symmetrical. It resembles a sealed military object, stable and monumental, with a clear frontal perspective and a sense of silent authority.



While researching fashion toys, I came across the Labubu Mecha series from Pop Mart, which I personally collect. This combination of a cute, static character inside a large robotic suit inspired my concept of the king's stage. Rather than walking or moving on his own, the king is elevated and transported by a mechanical structure.

Final sketches



The idea of using a glass display dome was inspired by Balenciaga's 2022 winter show. In that show, models walked through a closed transparent space filled with artificial snowstorms. The scene created a contrast between environmental severity and fashion elegance. The brand described it as "elegance in a manufactured disaster." Building on that concept, I designed the emperor to stand inside a glass-covered stage with artificial snow falling inside. No matter how lightly dressed he is, he remains unaffected, creating a sense of detachment and control. This setting reflects how fashion brands construct visual illusions—no matter how cold or absurd the reality is, the visual narrative stays intact. The glass dome becomes not just protection, but a symbolic boundary between brand-crafted fantasy and the outside world.

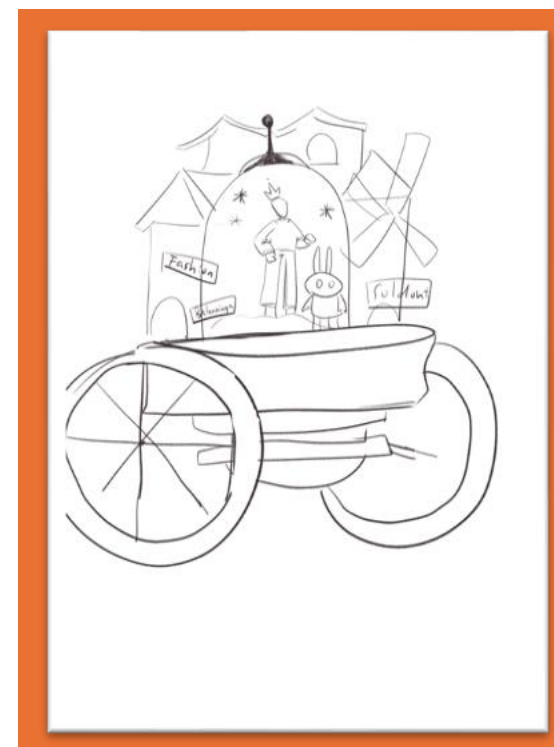
This page shows a few sketches I made while thinking about the final form of the mechanical stage.



The first one is inspired by the thin mechanical legs often seen in Hayao Miyazaki's work. The idea is to make the upper part—like a small city or display world—feel heavy and complex, while the legs just barely support this giant “brand monster.”

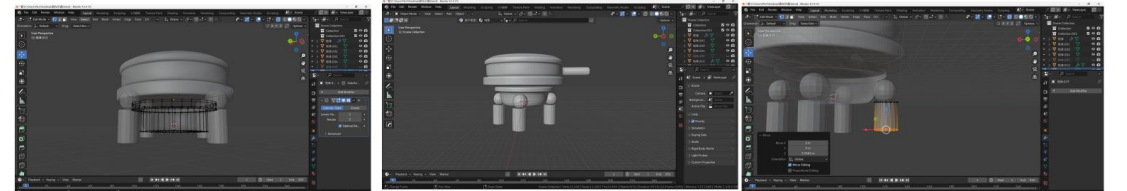
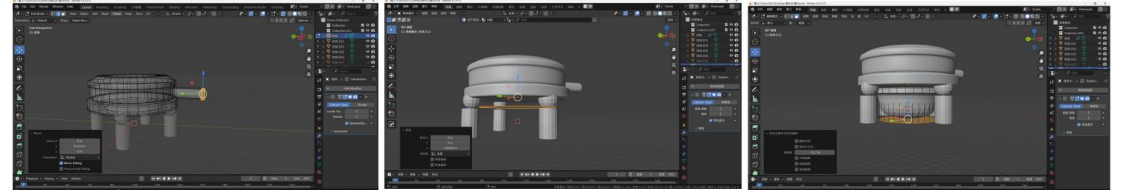
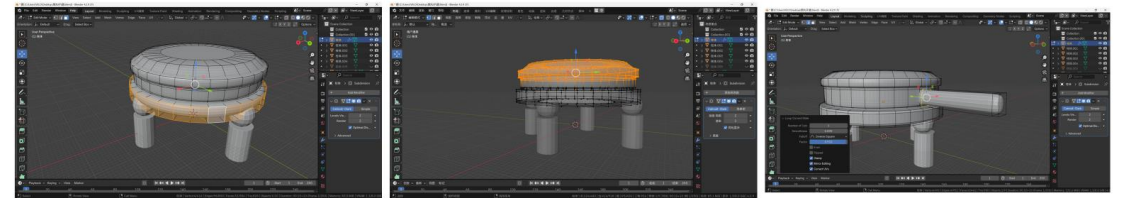
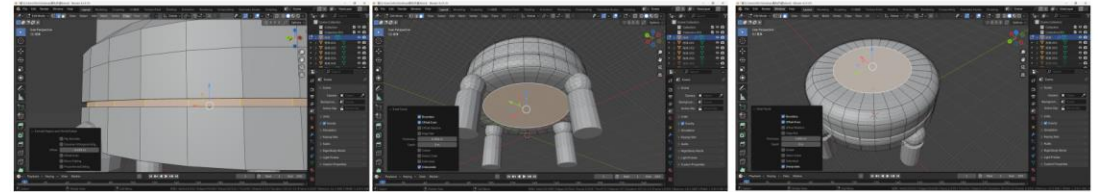
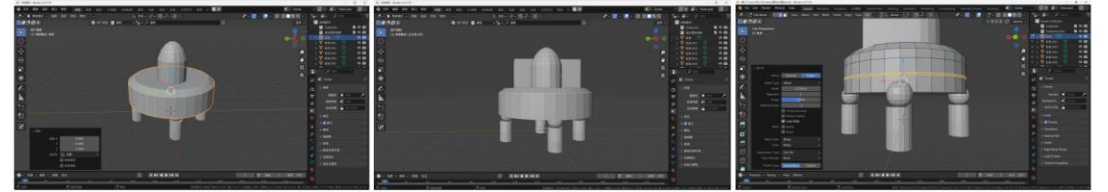
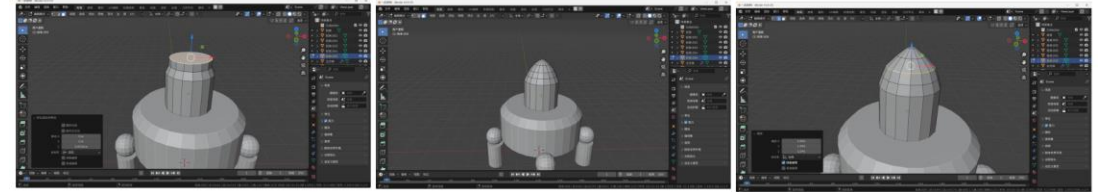
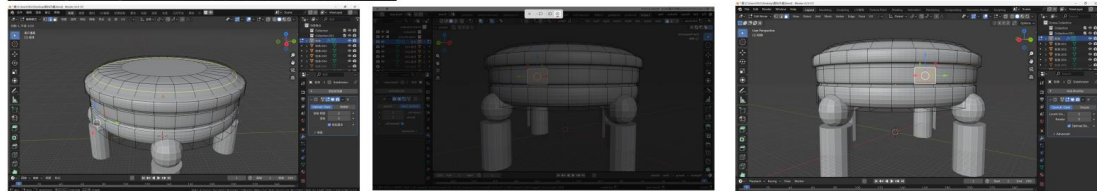
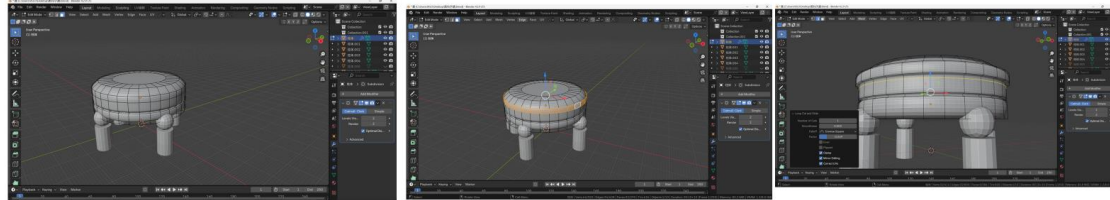
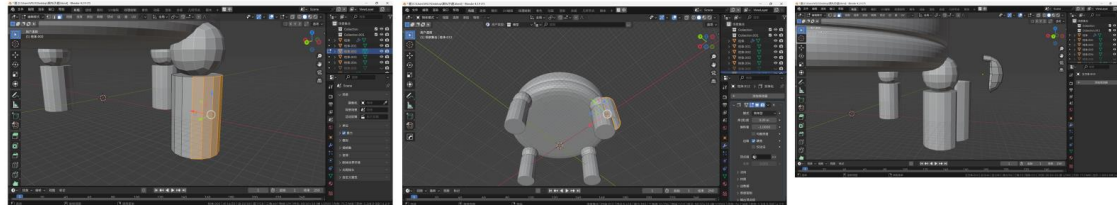
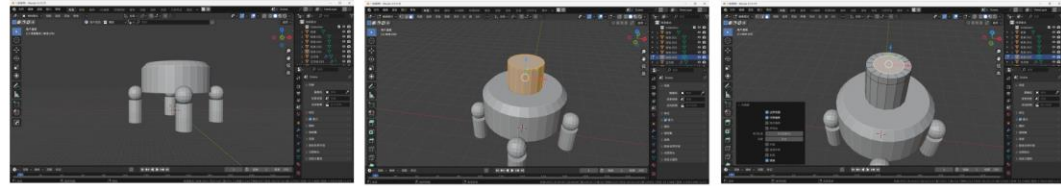
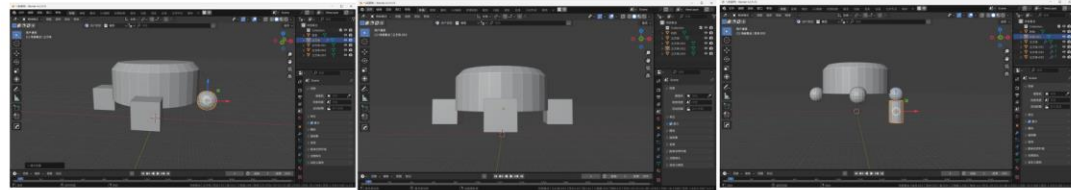
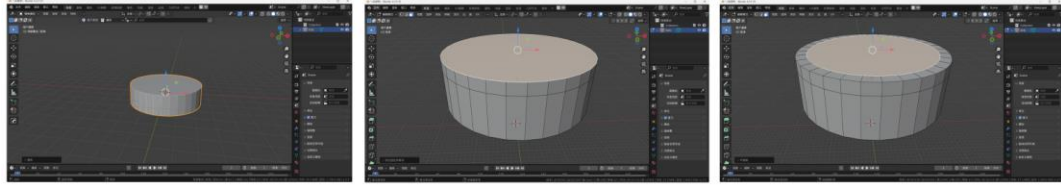


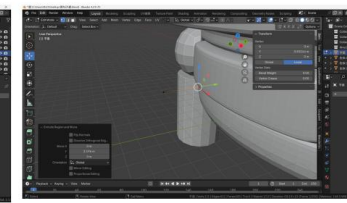
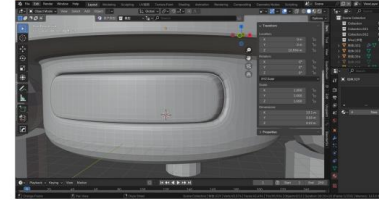
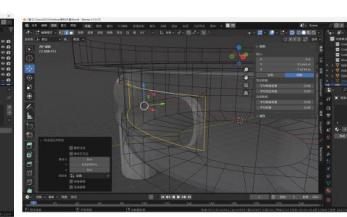
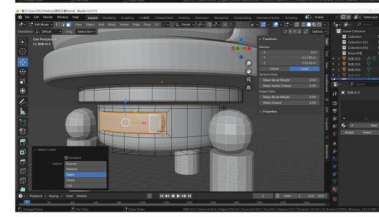
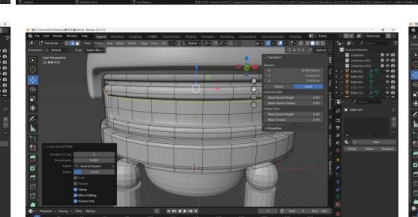
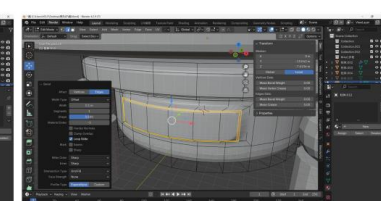
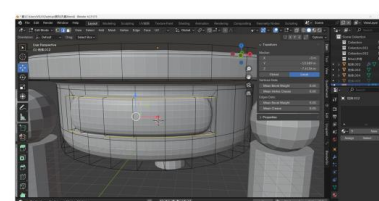
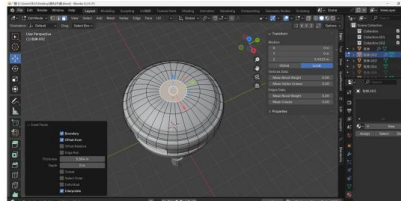
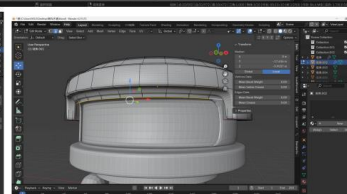
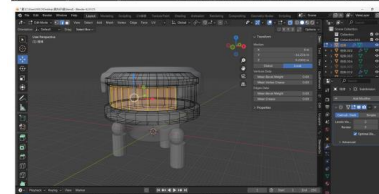
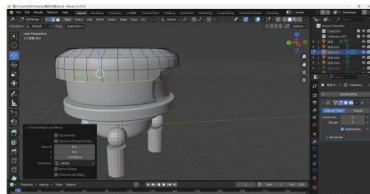
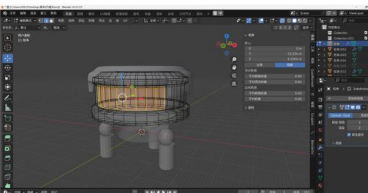
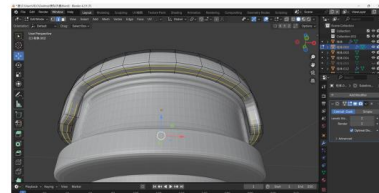
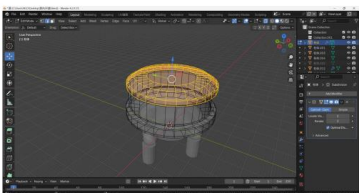
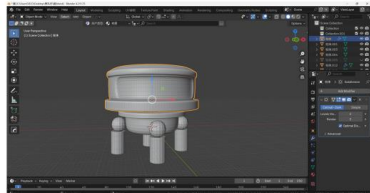
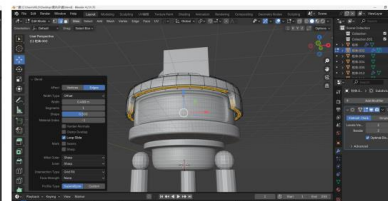
In the second version, I enlarged the lower part and gave it four thick, robot-like legs. Compared to the first one, this shifts the focus from the architectural display on top to the machine structure underneath. The goal is to make the base feel more dominant and powerful, emphasizing the sense of authority in the whole design.

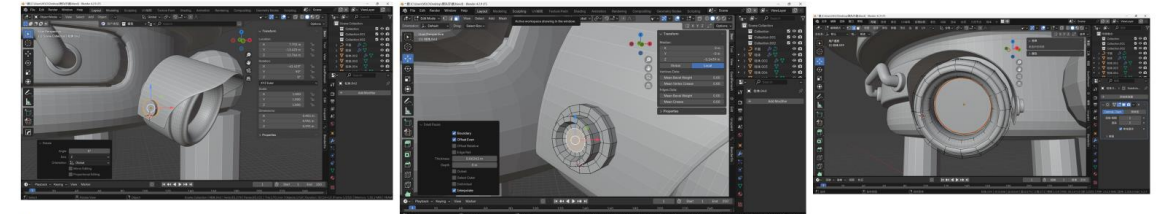
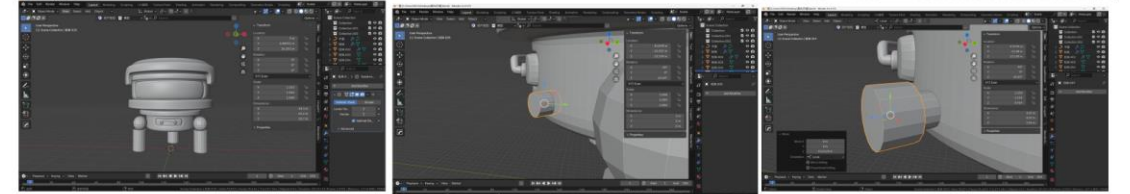
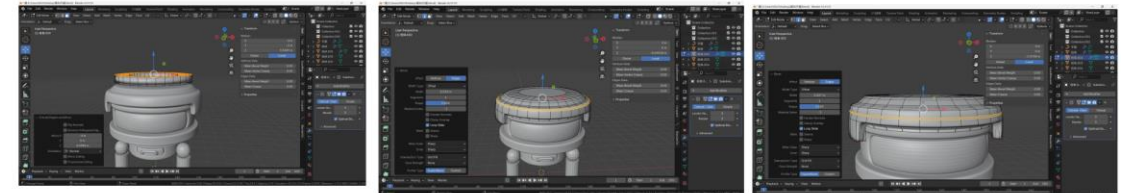
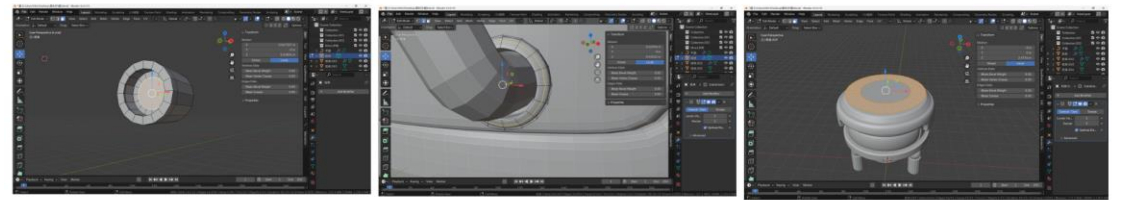
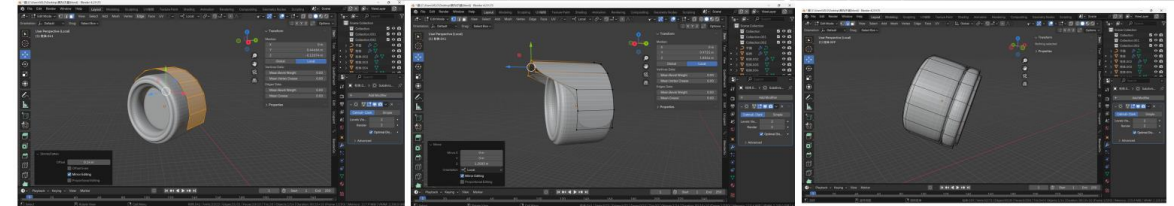
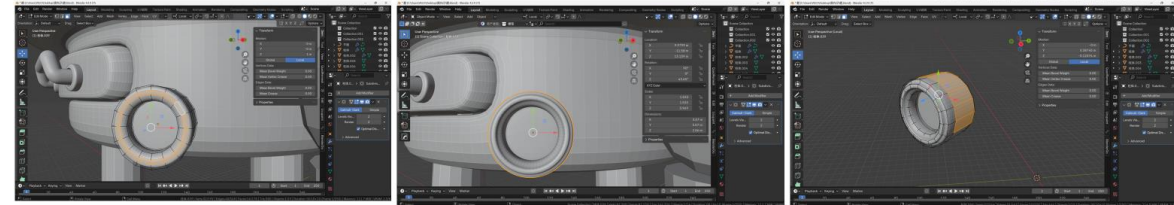
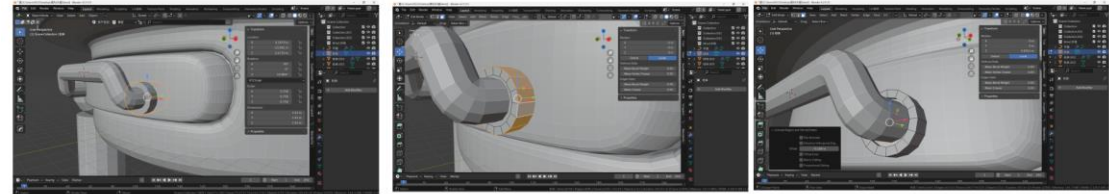
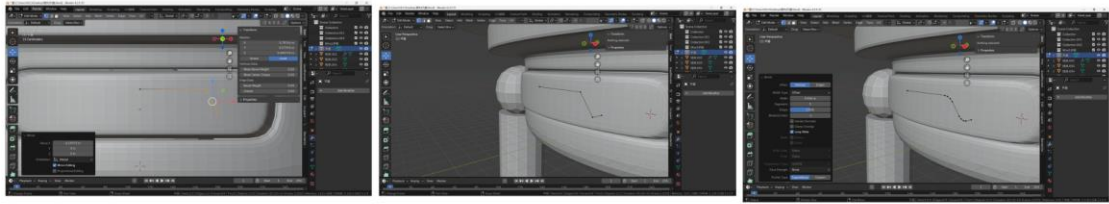


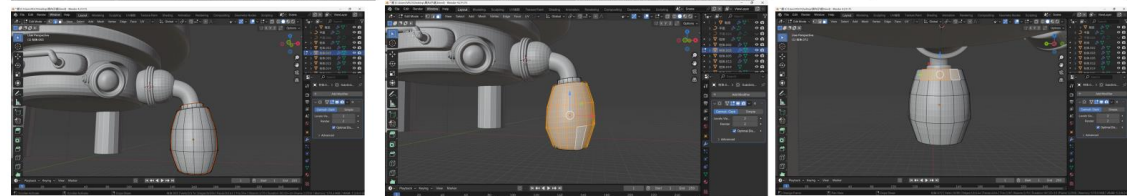
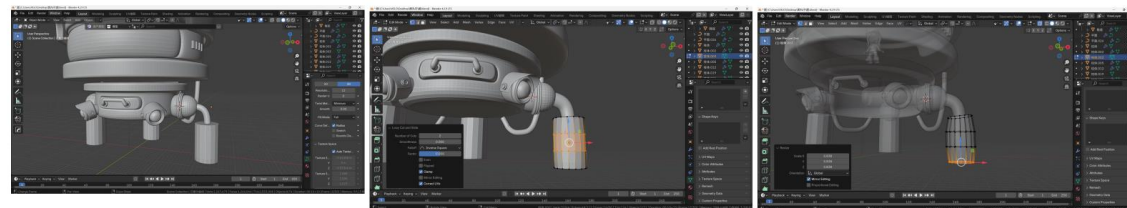
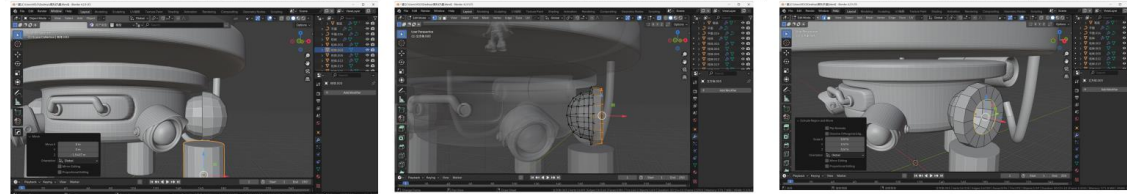
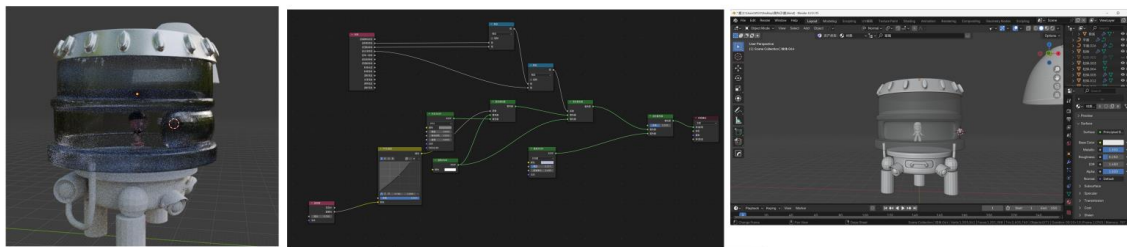
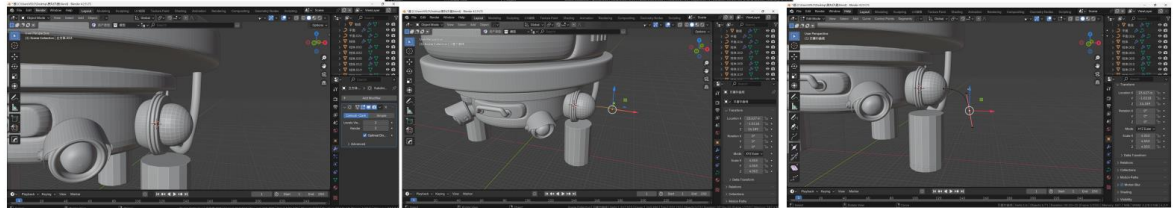
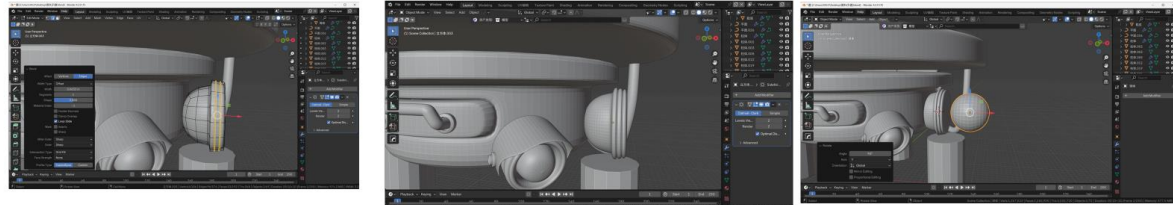
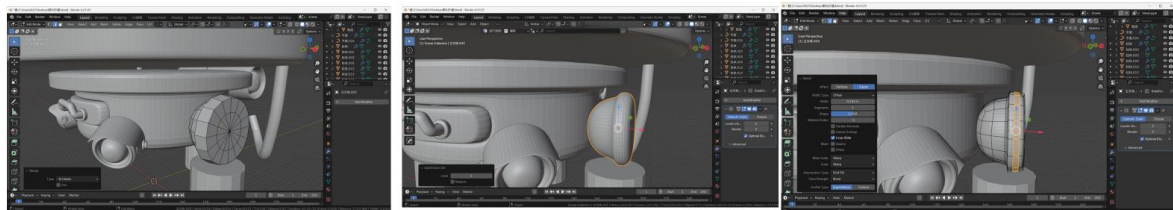
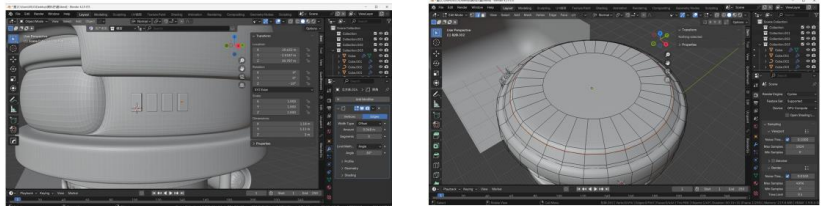
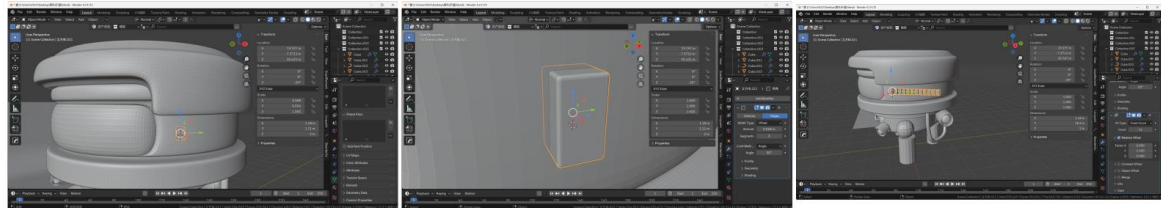
In the third version, I replaced the legs with wheels to test if it could look more like a movable cart or vehicle. But visually, the wheels make it feel a bit less authoritative, so I'm still deciding whether to keep that direction.

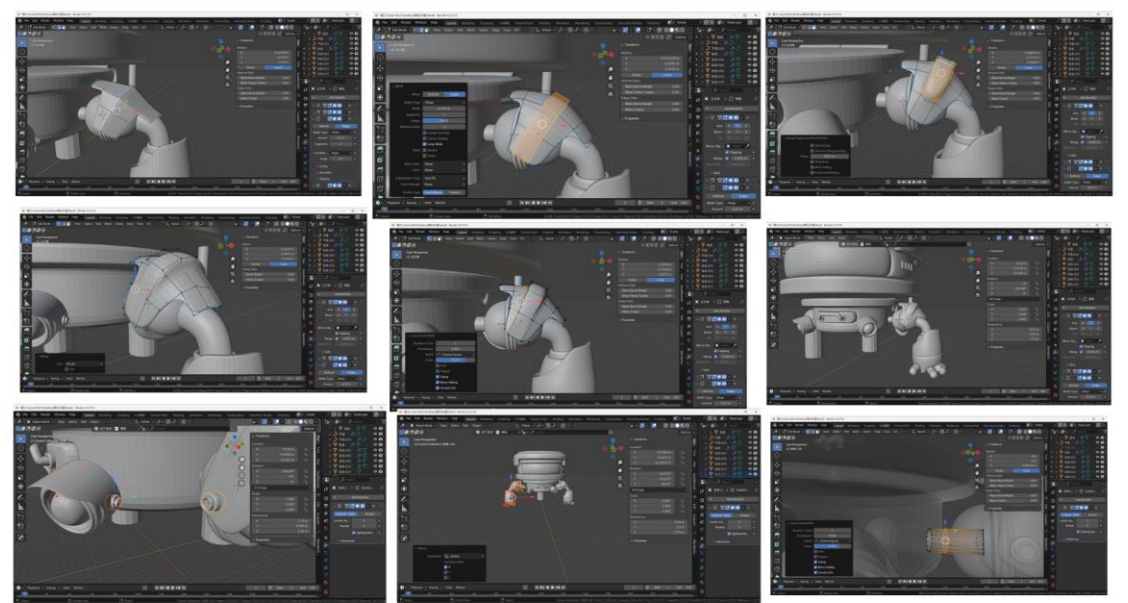
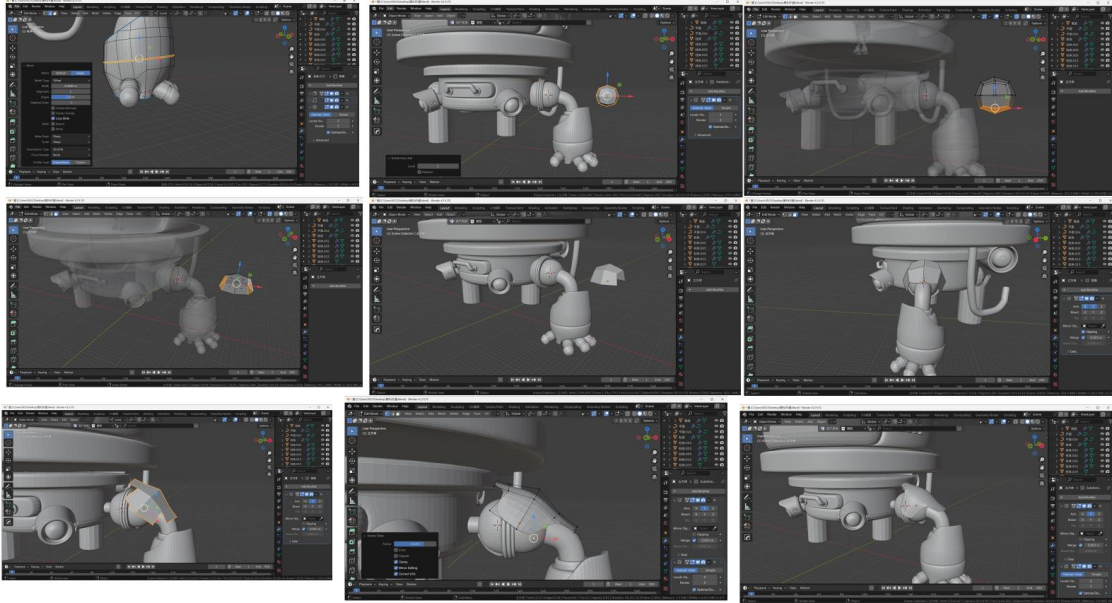
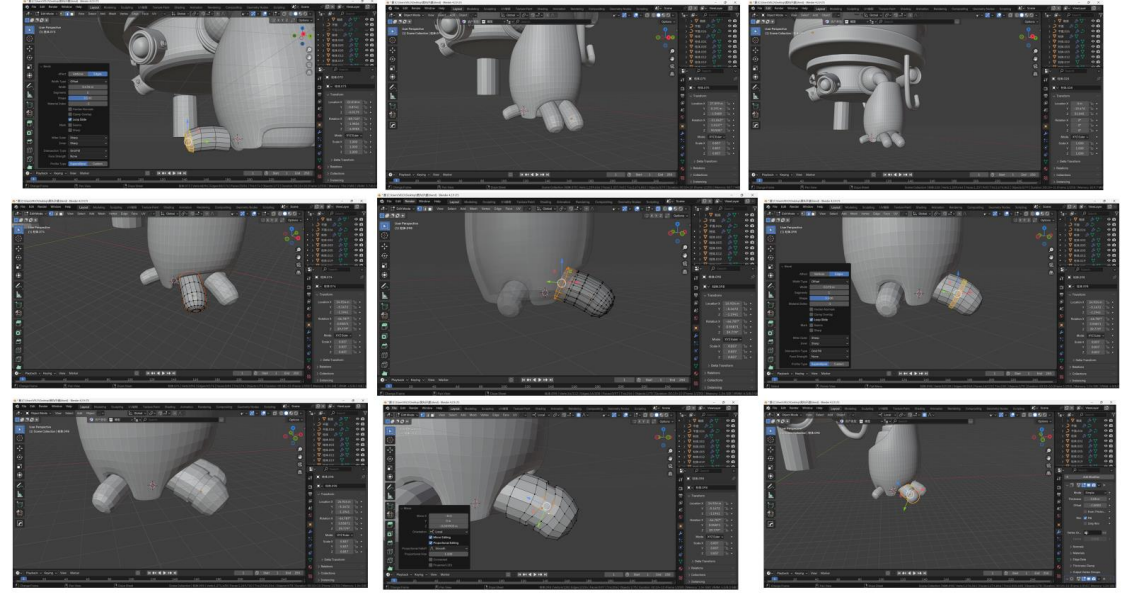
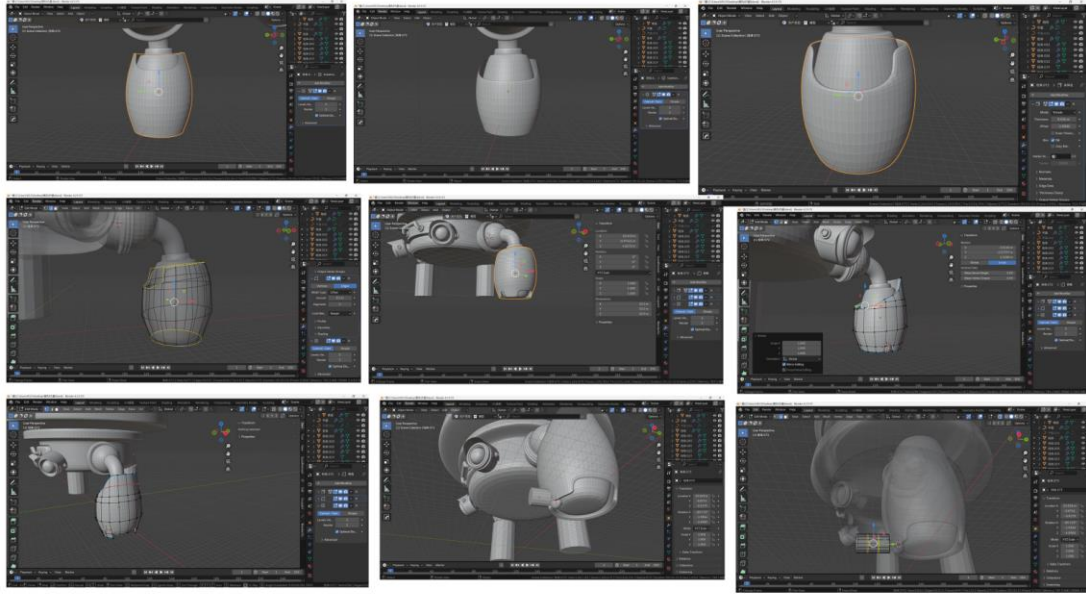
Develop process

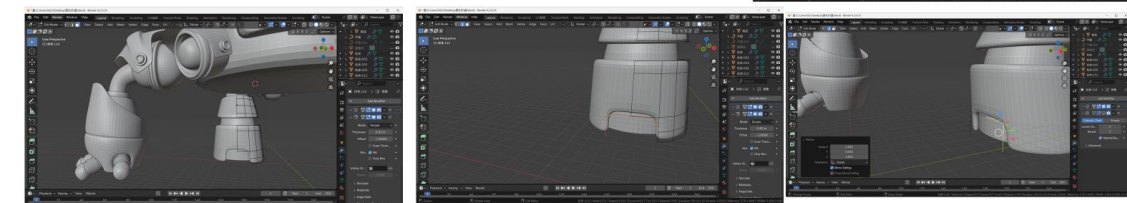
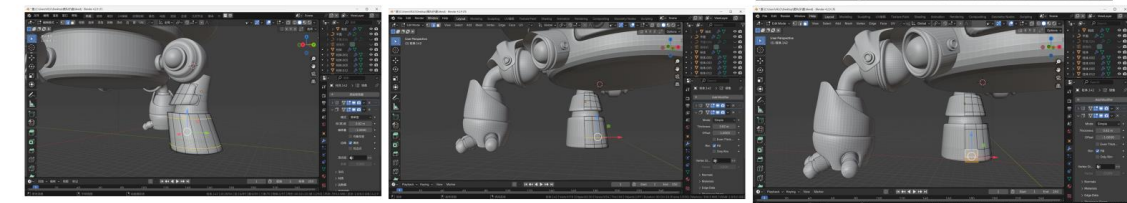
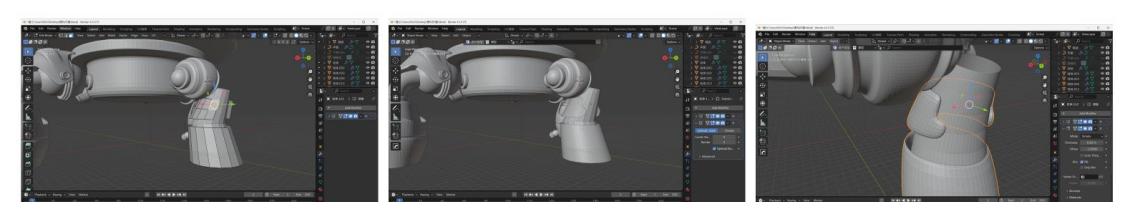
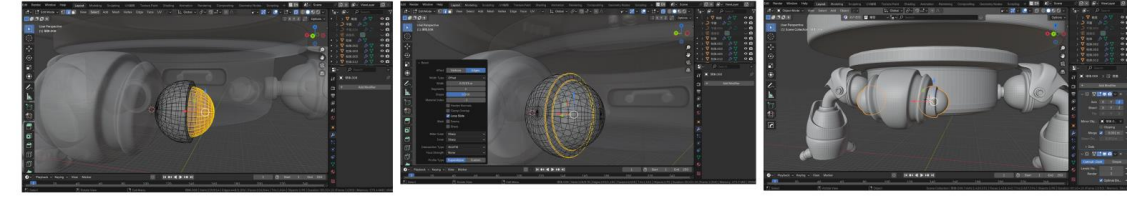
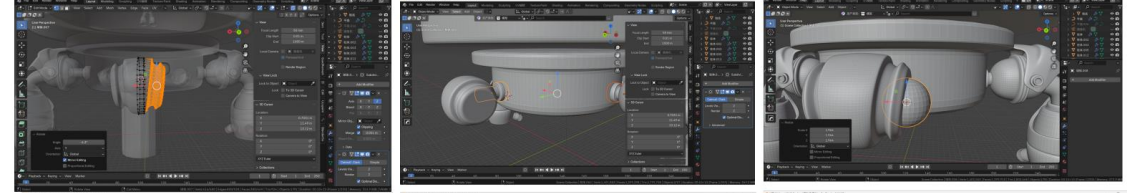
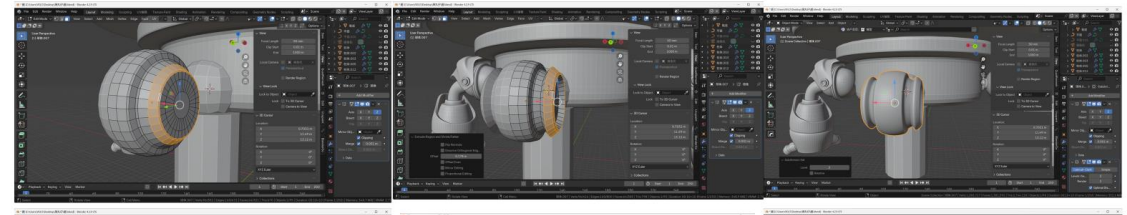
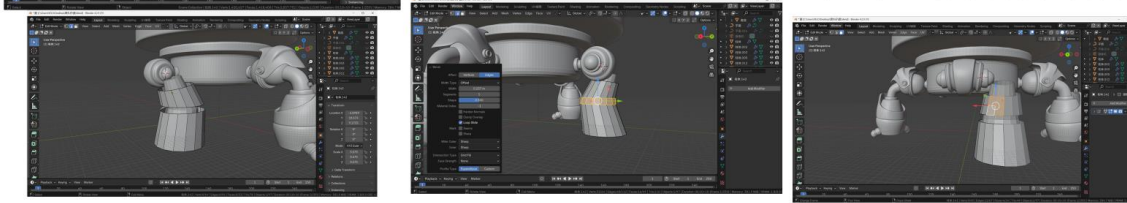
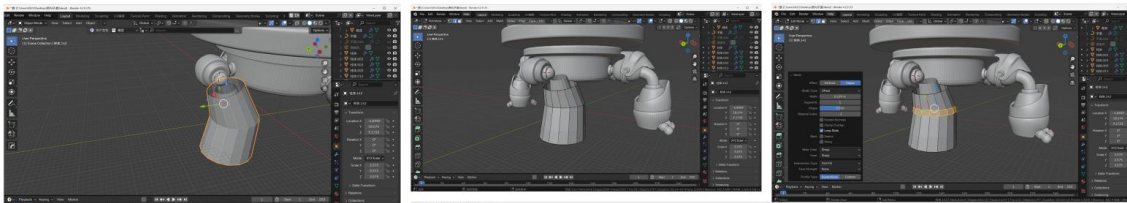
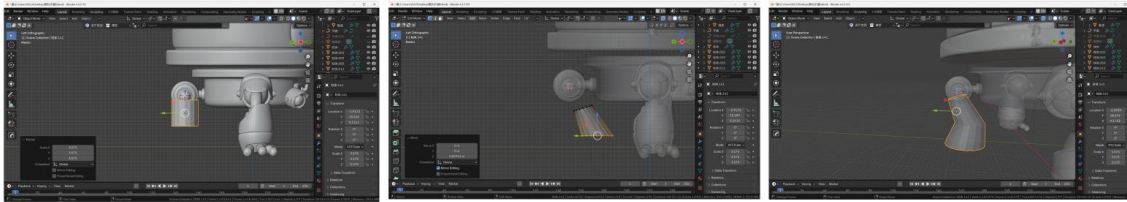
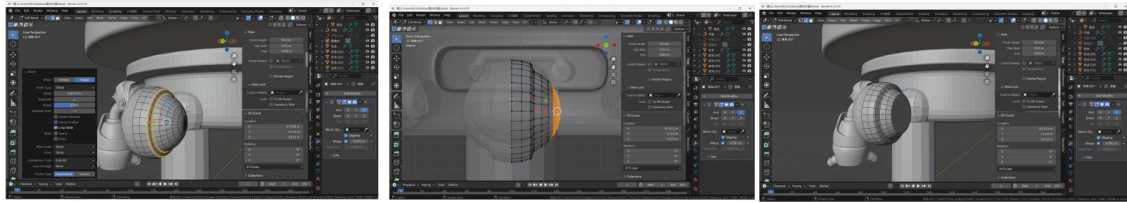
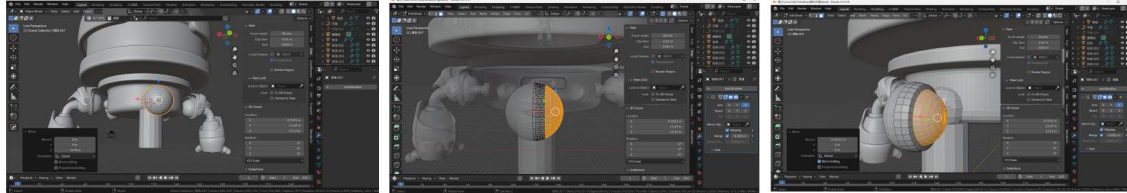
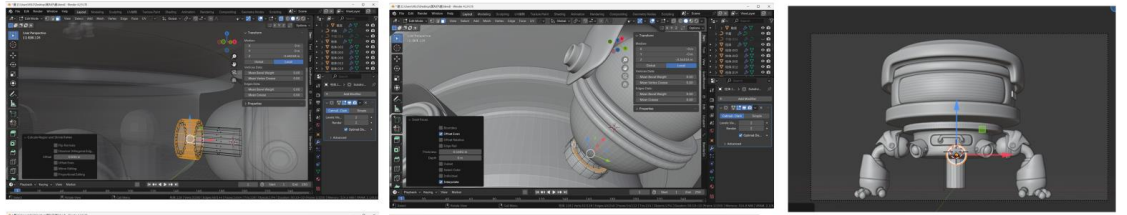




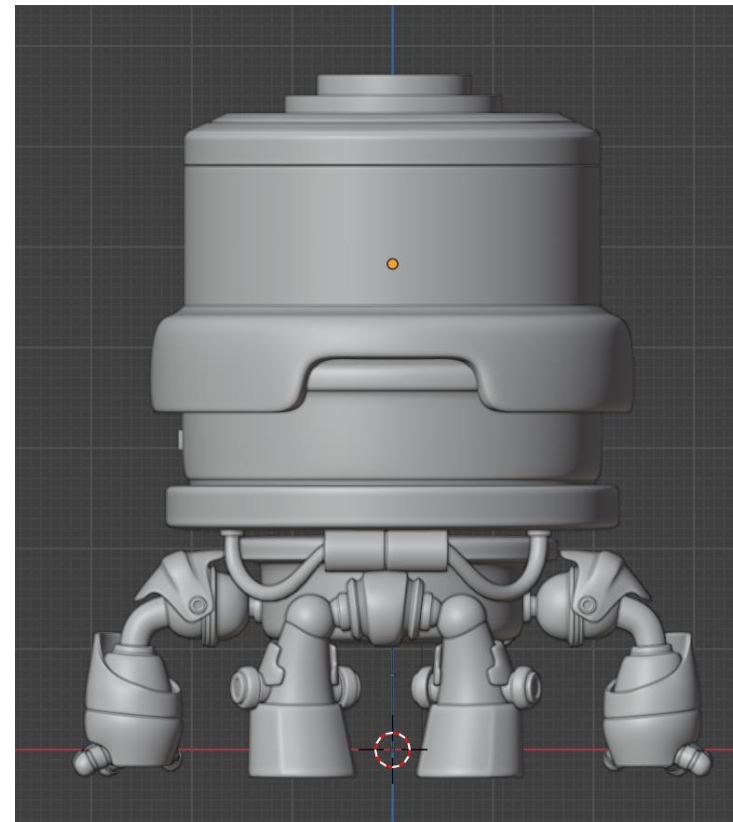
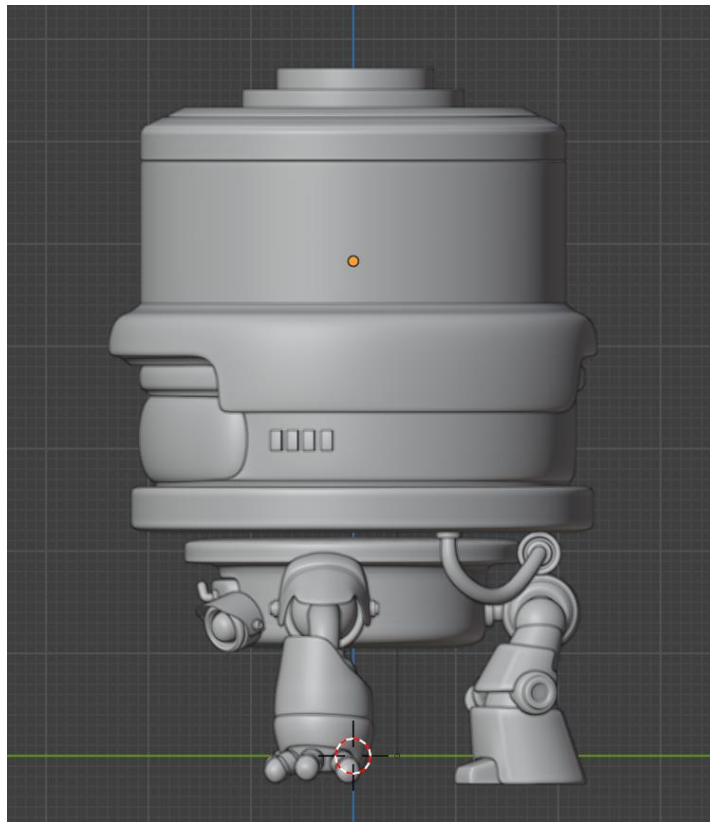
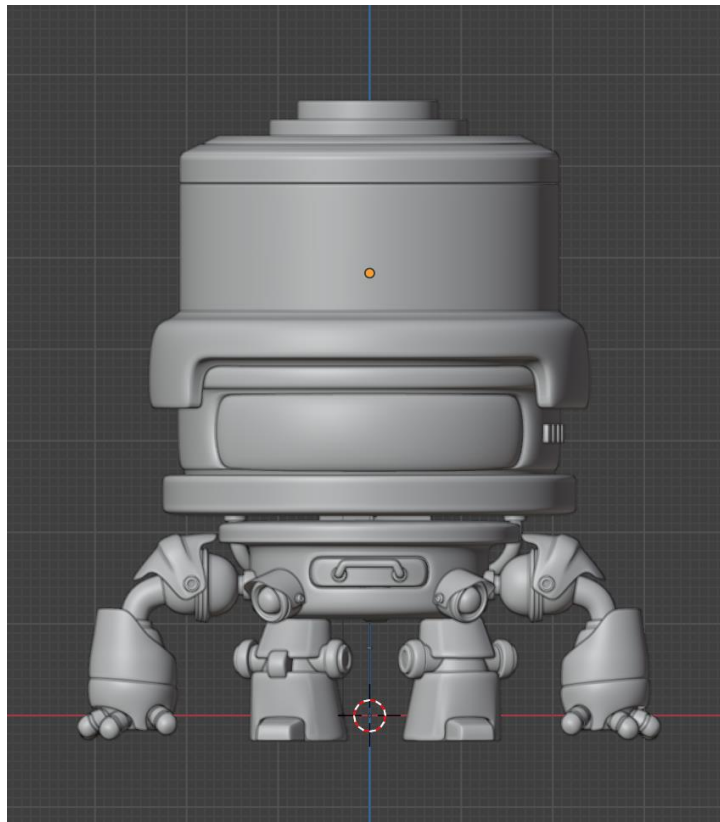


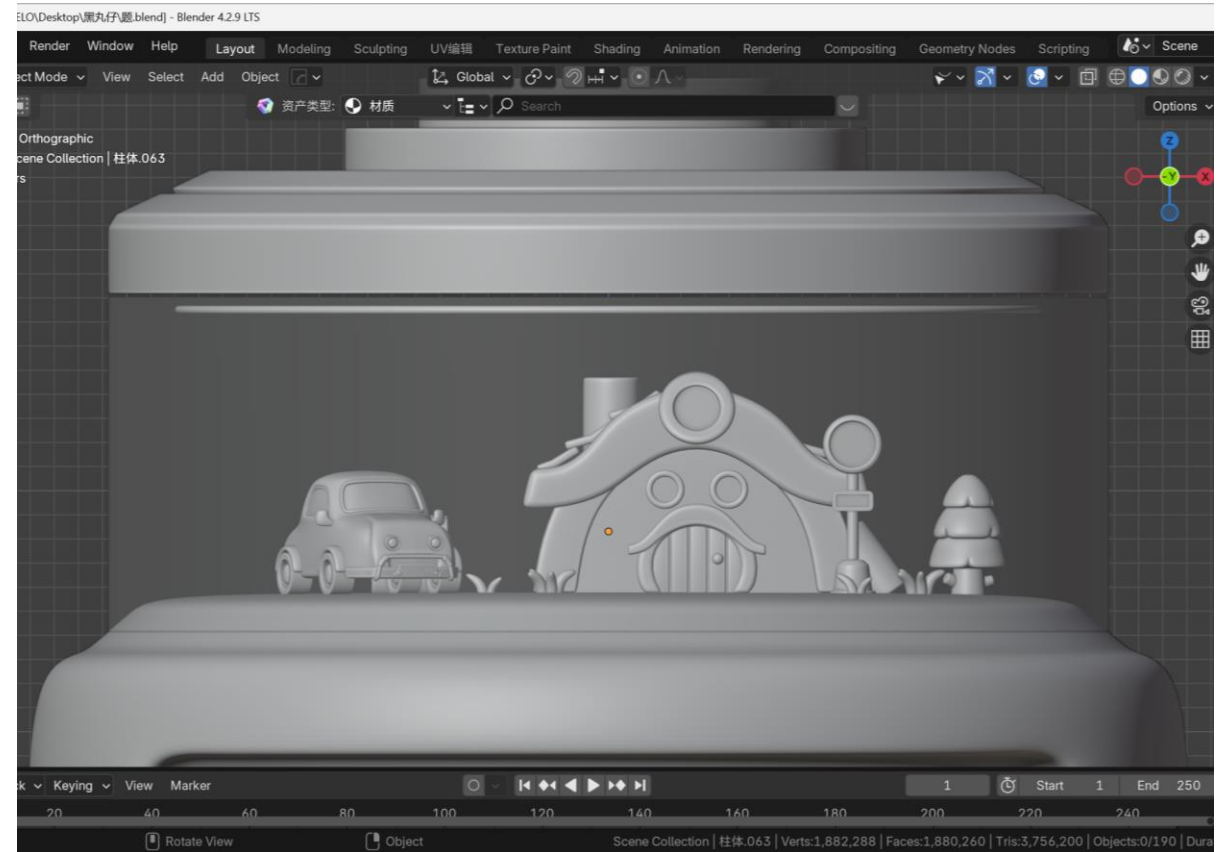
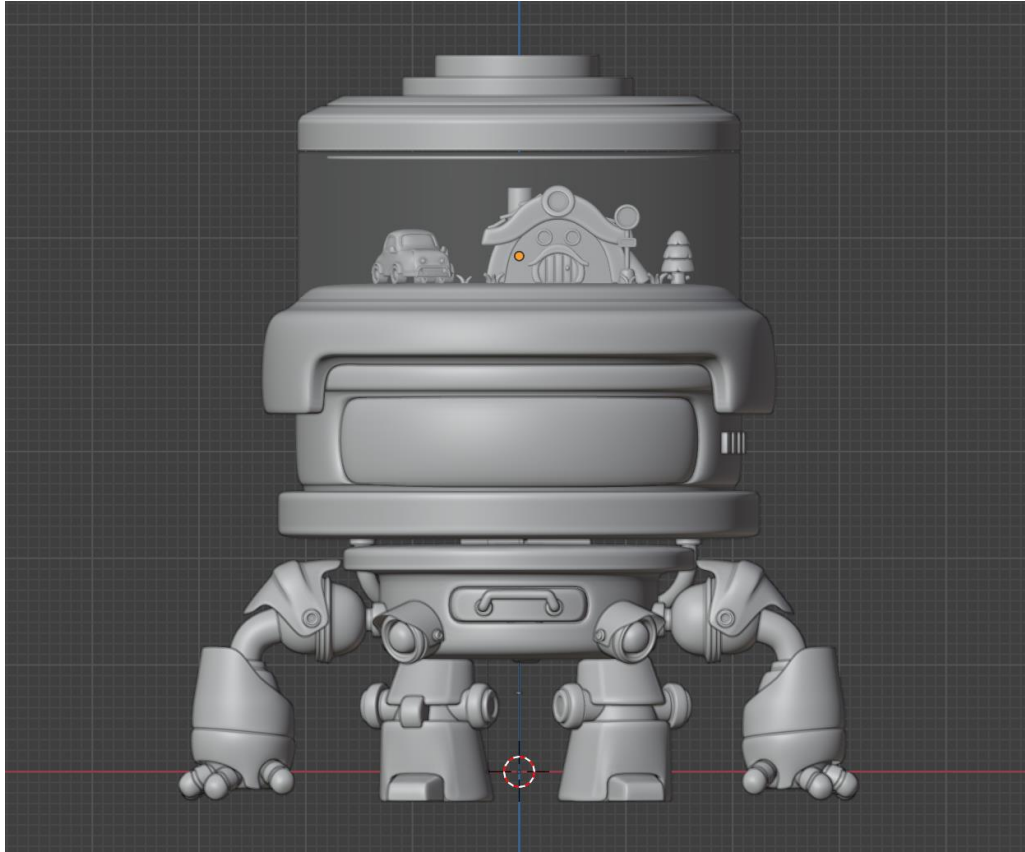




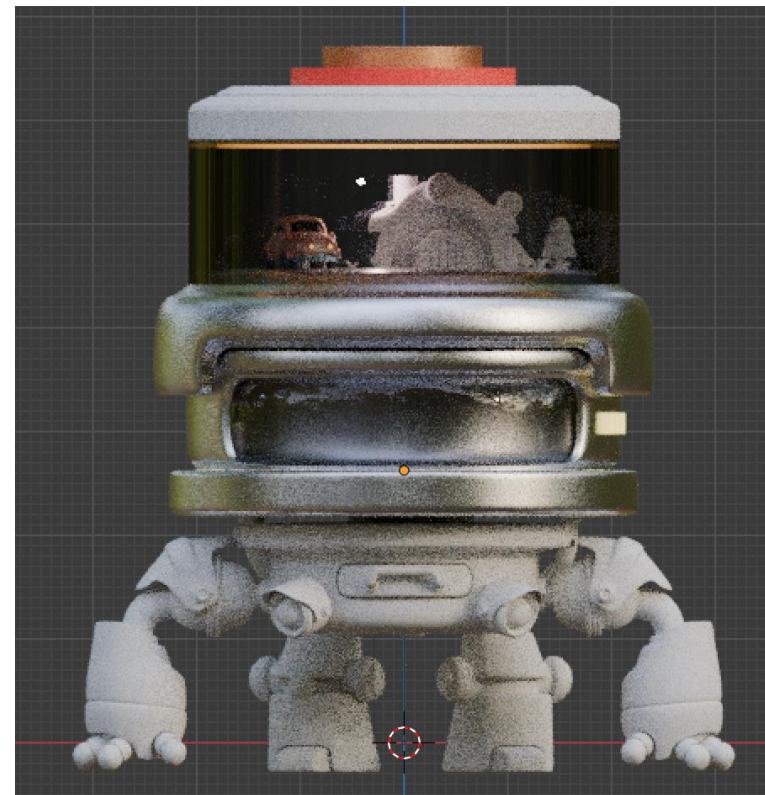
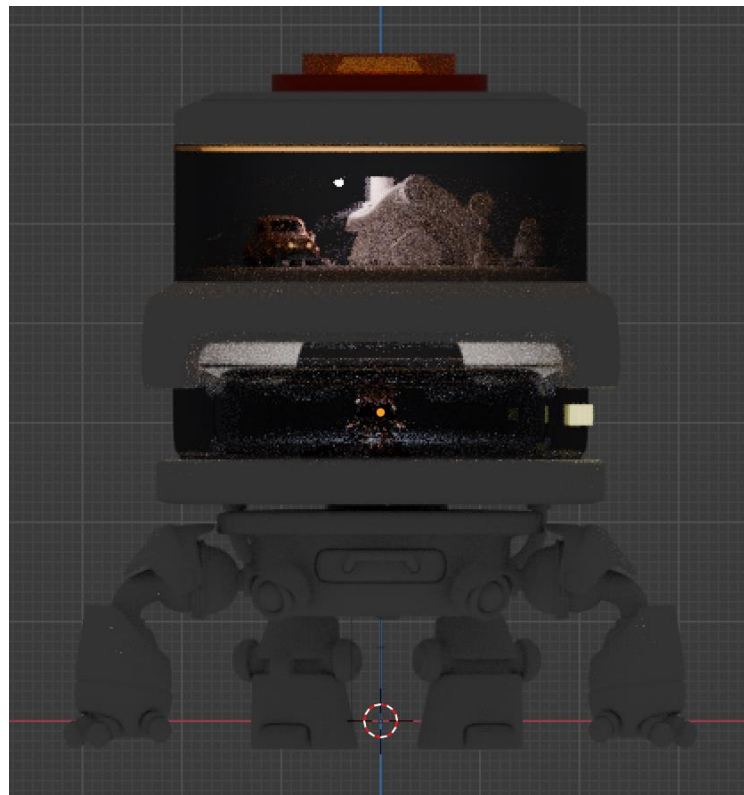
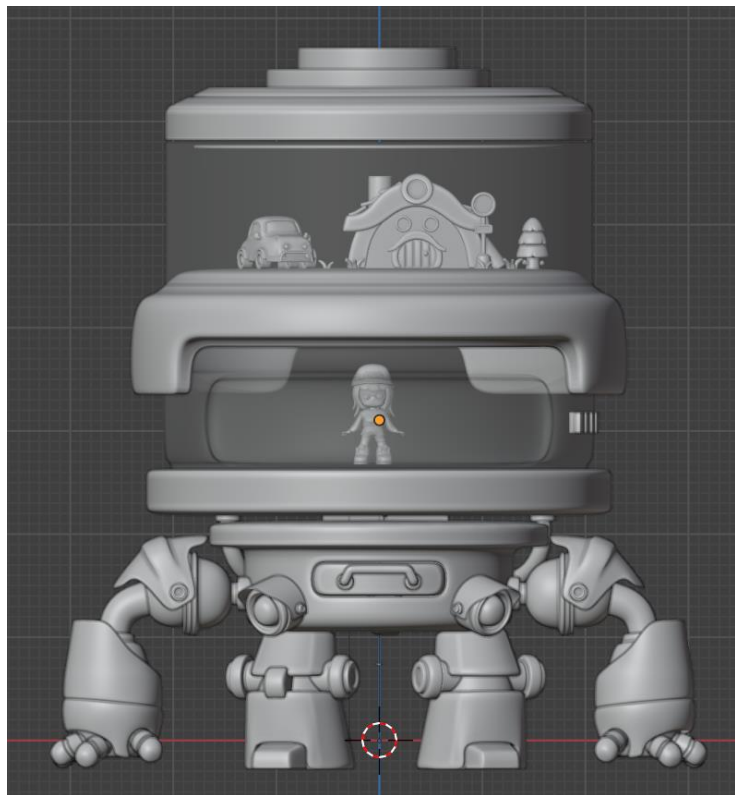


Final outcome 3d model



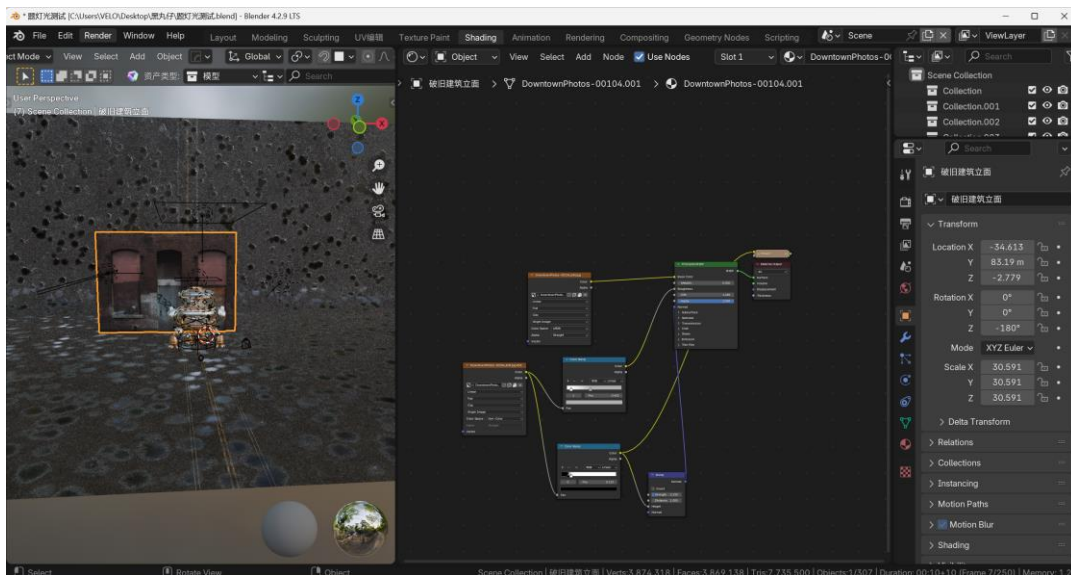
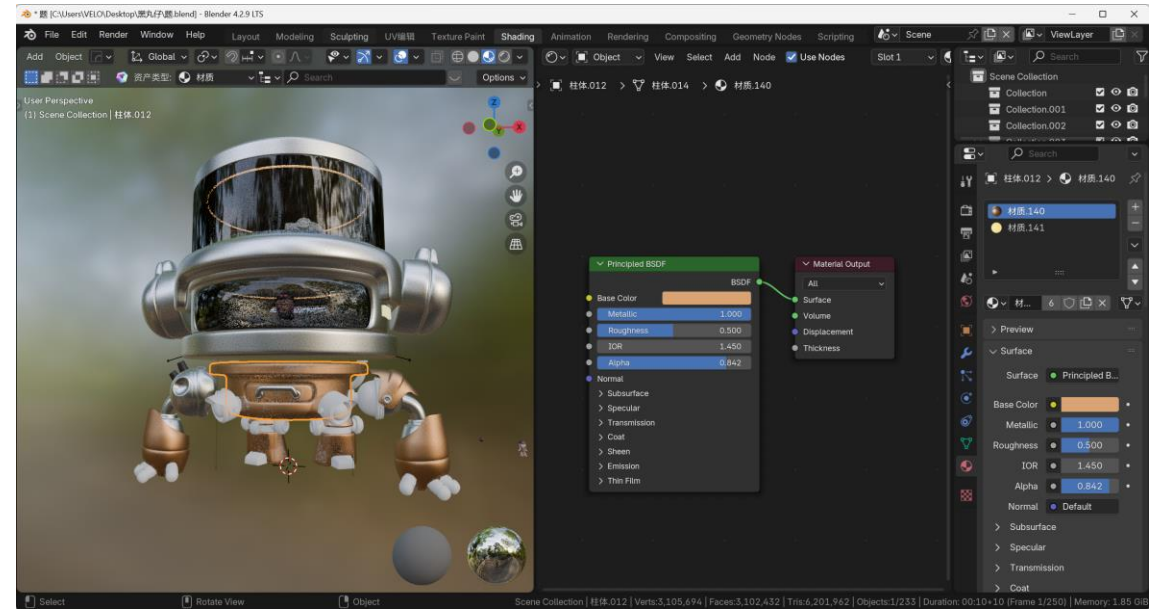
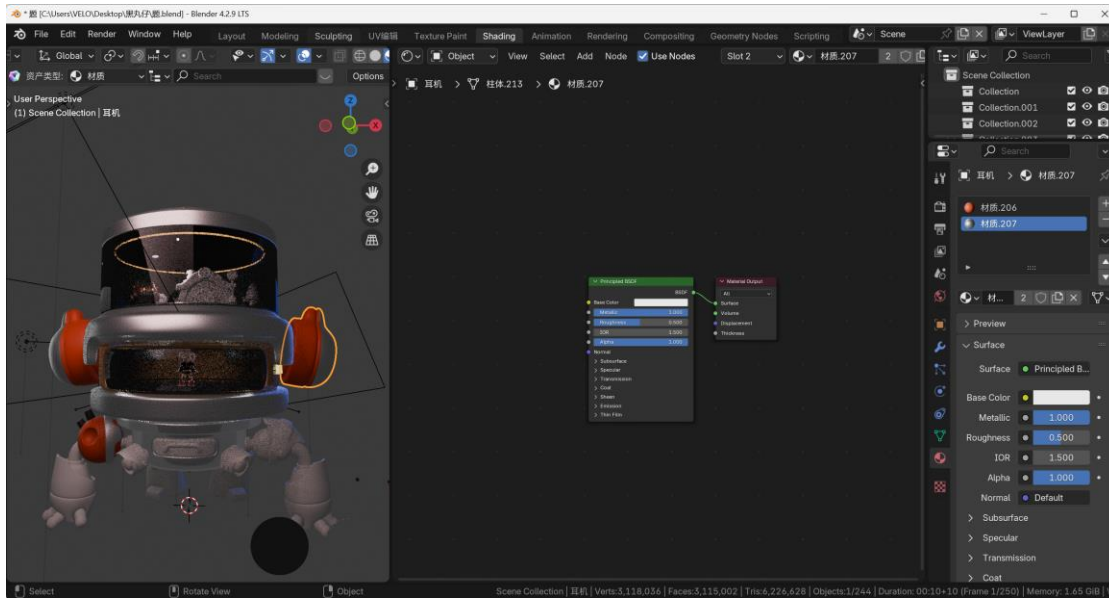


I built this part based on my previous concept sketch. The upper section uses transparent material to create a dome, inside which I placed miniature buildings and cars to form a symbolic micro world.

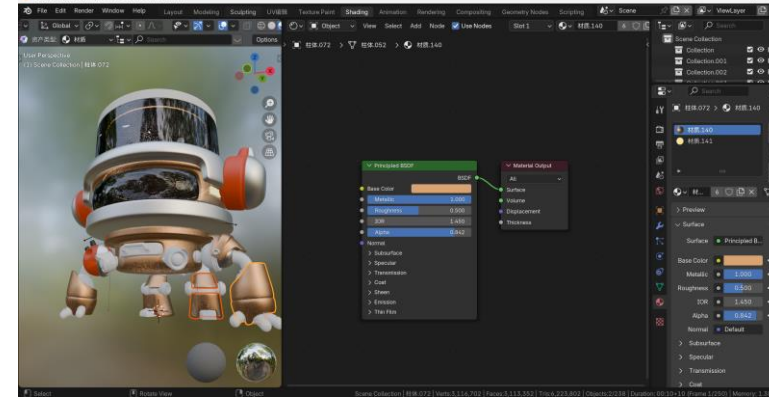
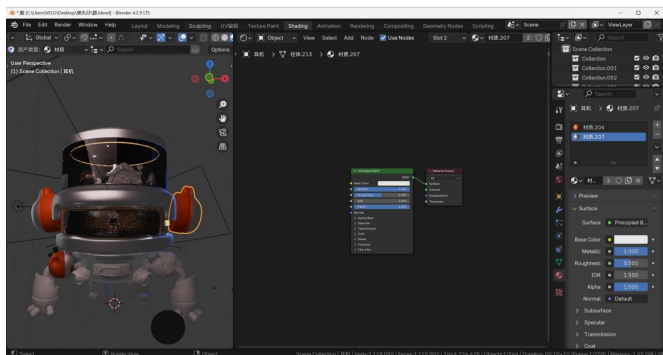
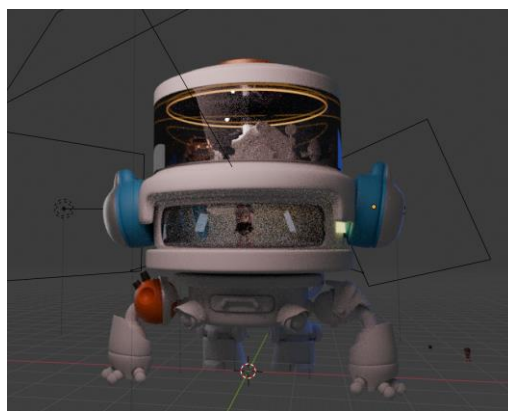
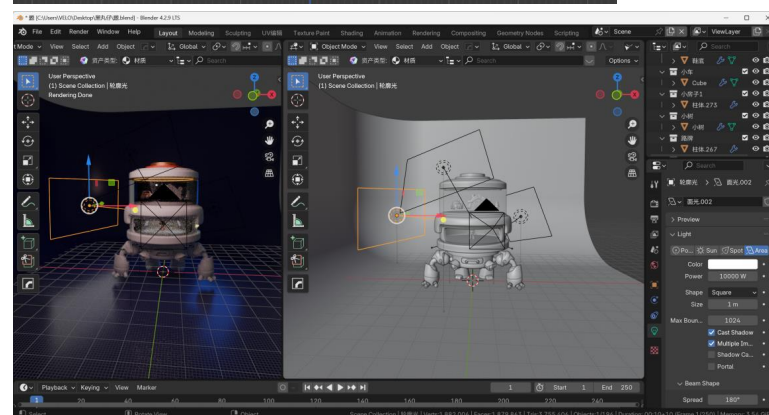
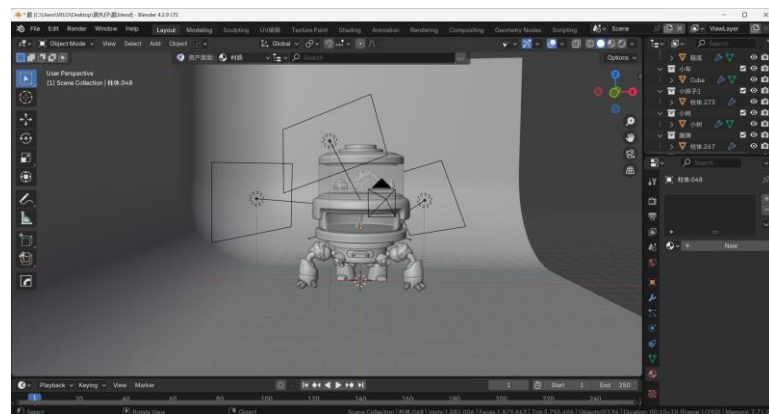
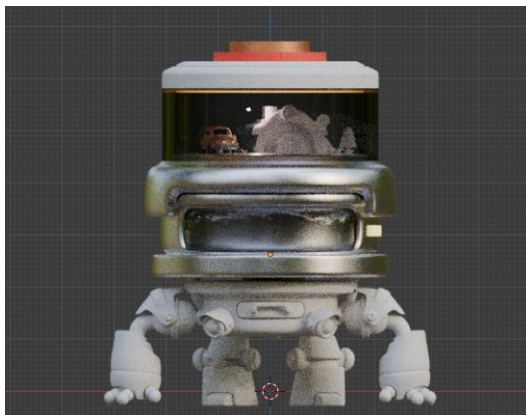
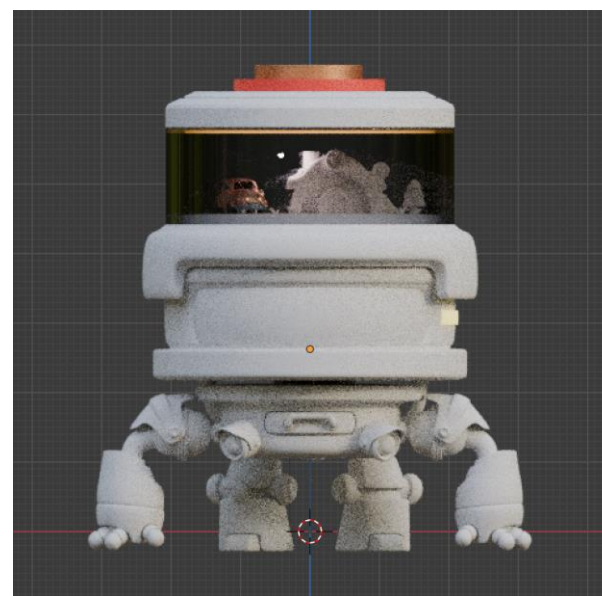
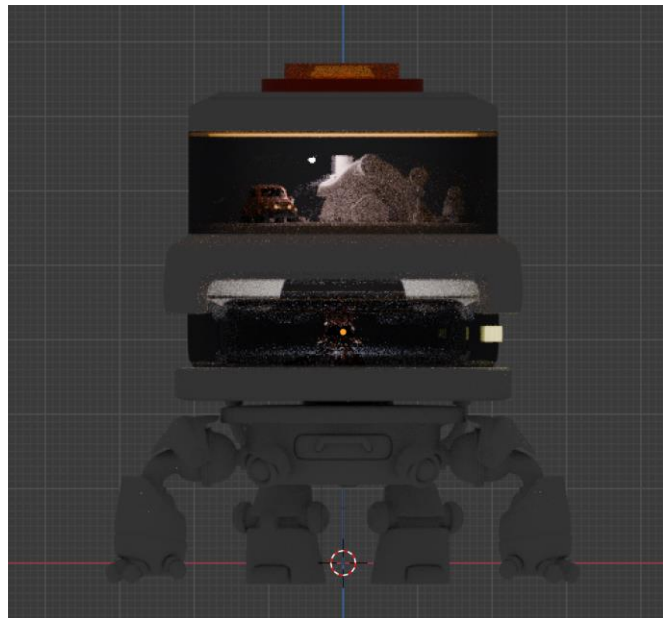
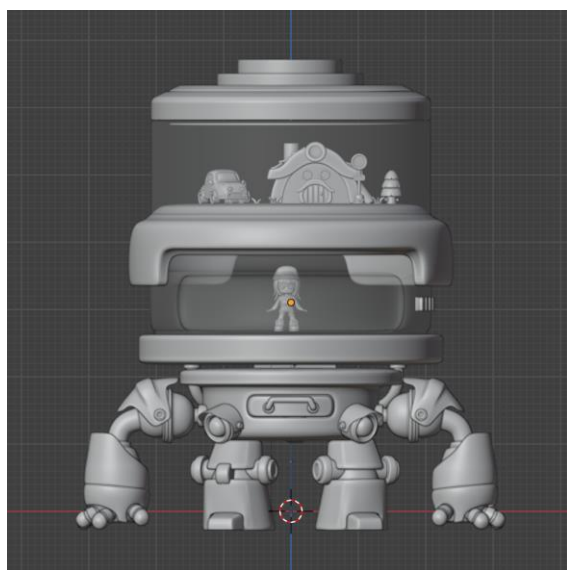


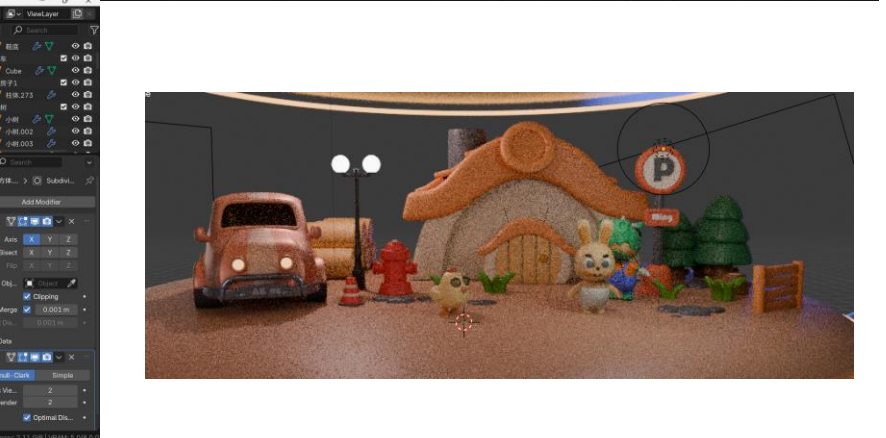
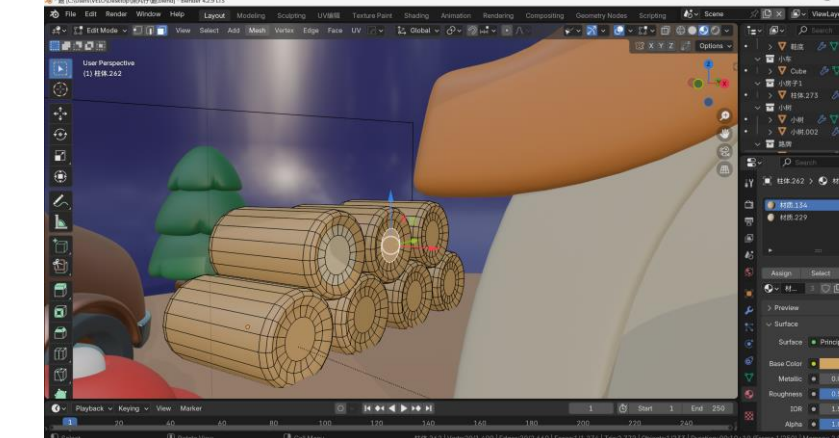
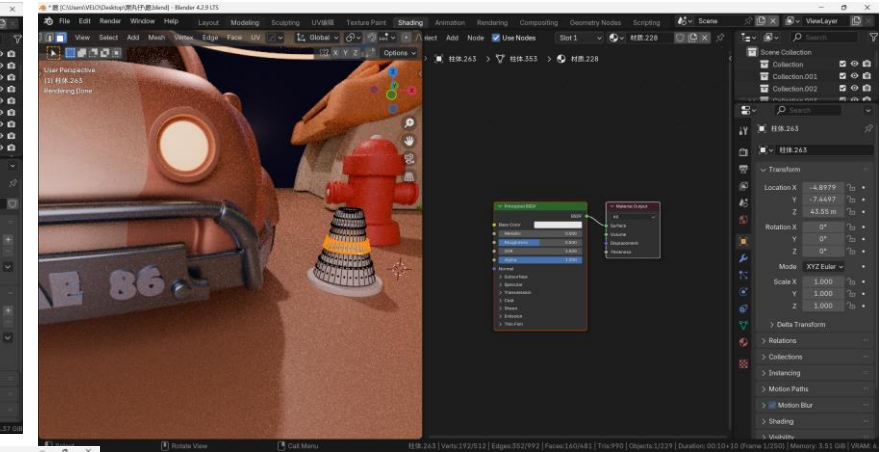
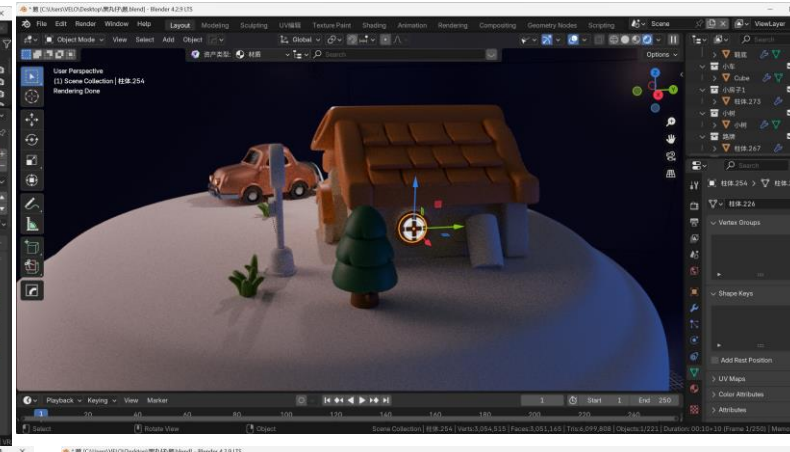
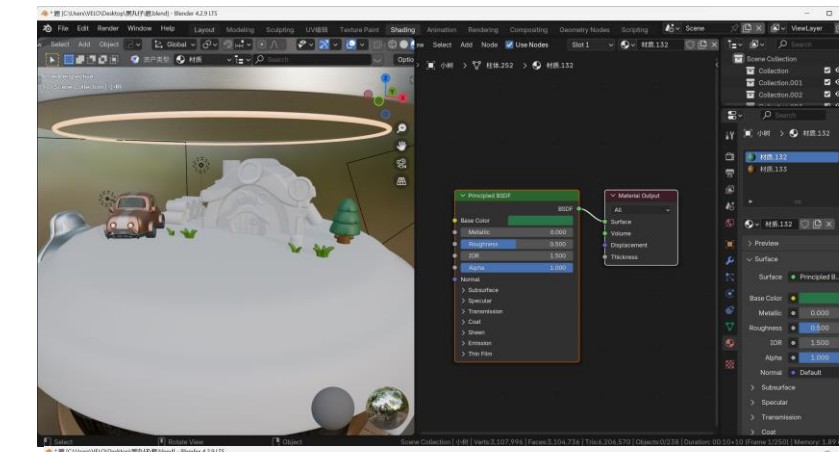
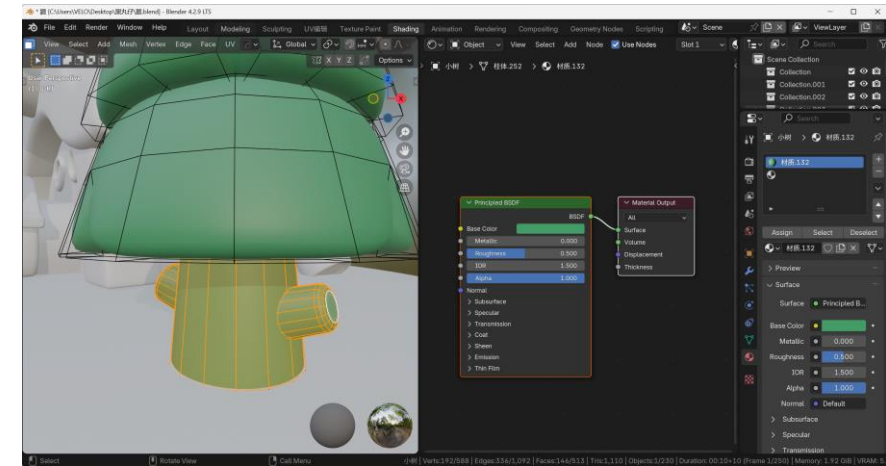
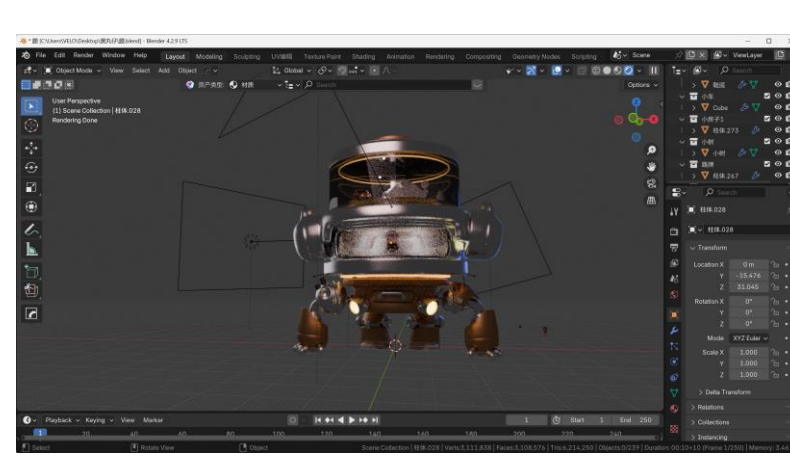
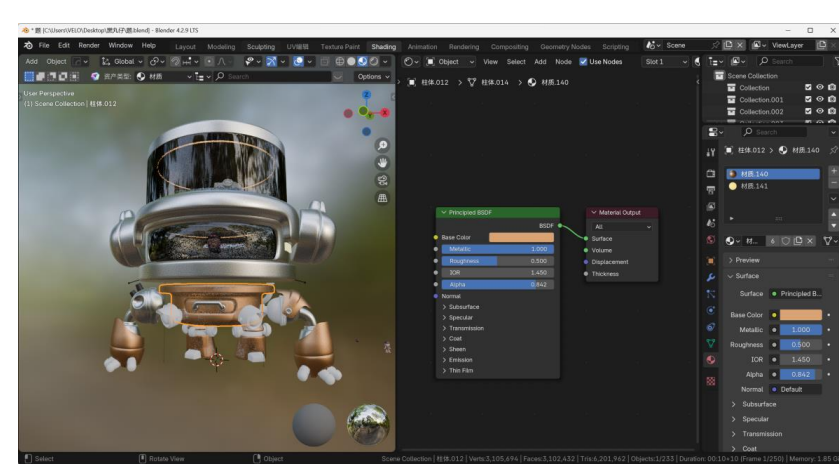
This page compares two versions of the mech: one with a single transparent layer and one with two. The single-layer highlights the mech's authority and sense of pressure, while the double-layer offers more space for narrative elements. I ultimately chose the single transparent layer design because it strengthens the visual impact of the mech, making it feel more dominant and authoritative. At the same time, it still allows viewers to clearly see the figure inside, maintaining the sense of staged display and control.

Texture and color

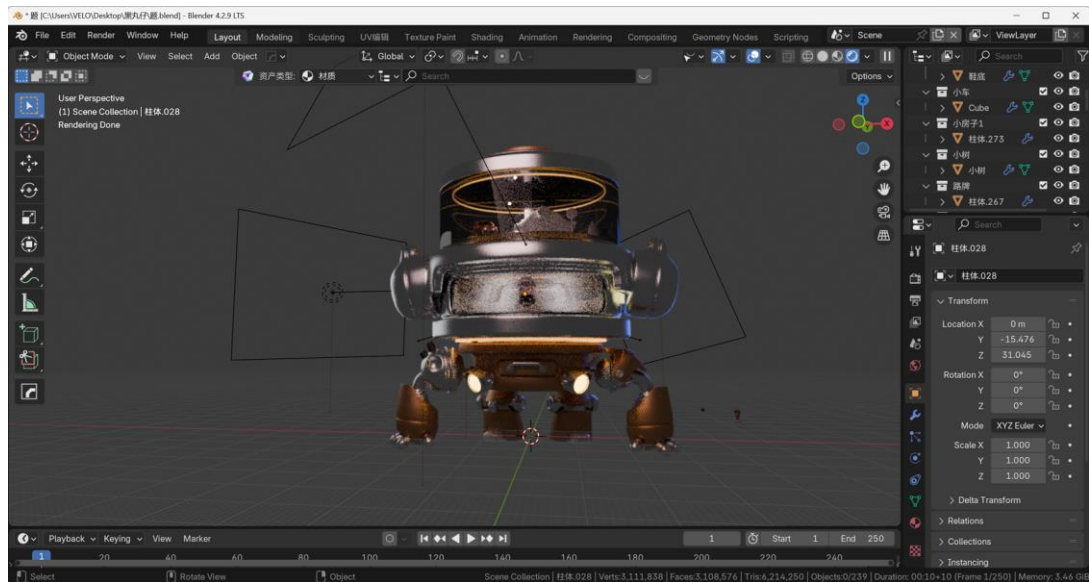
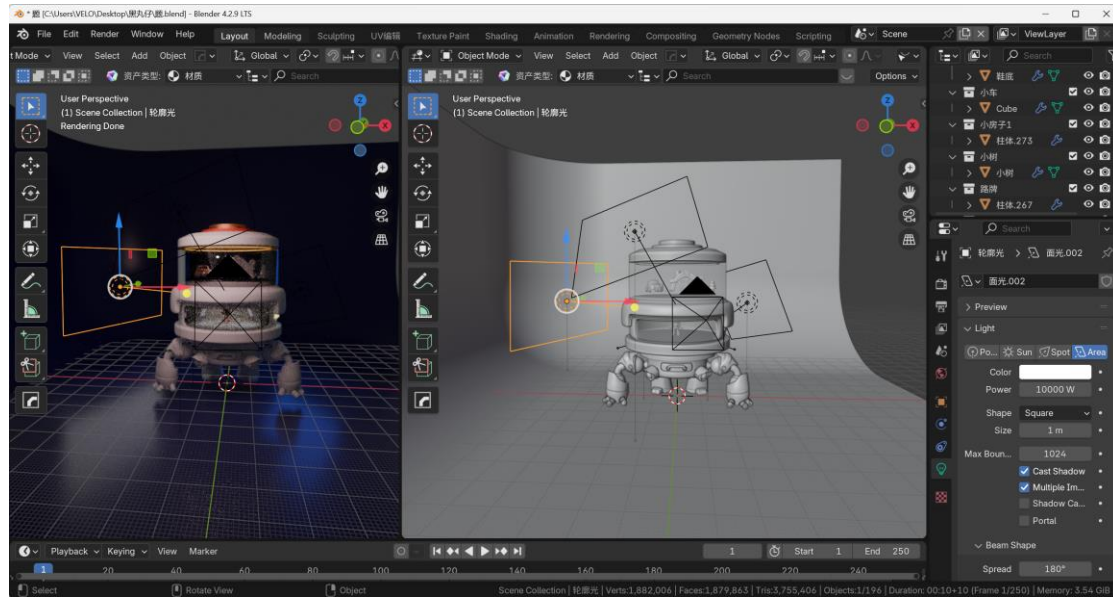


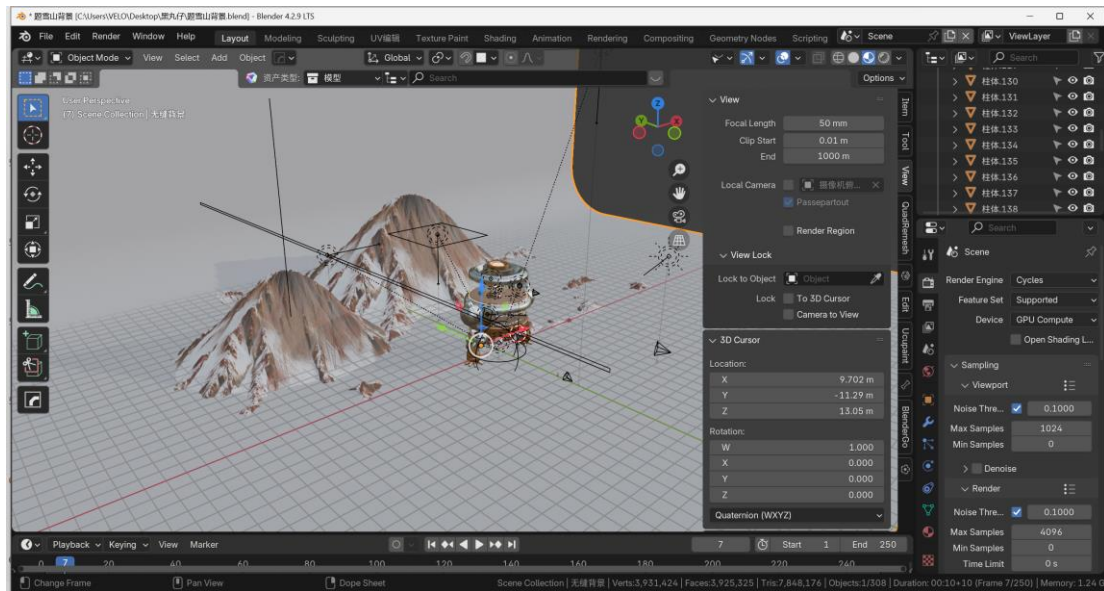
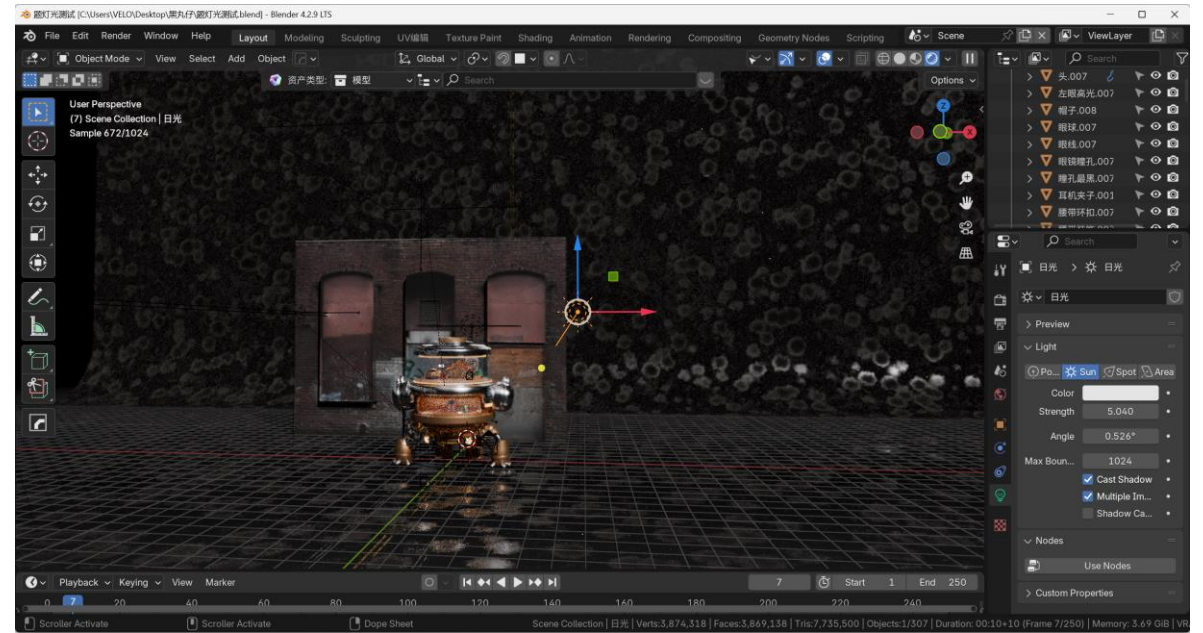
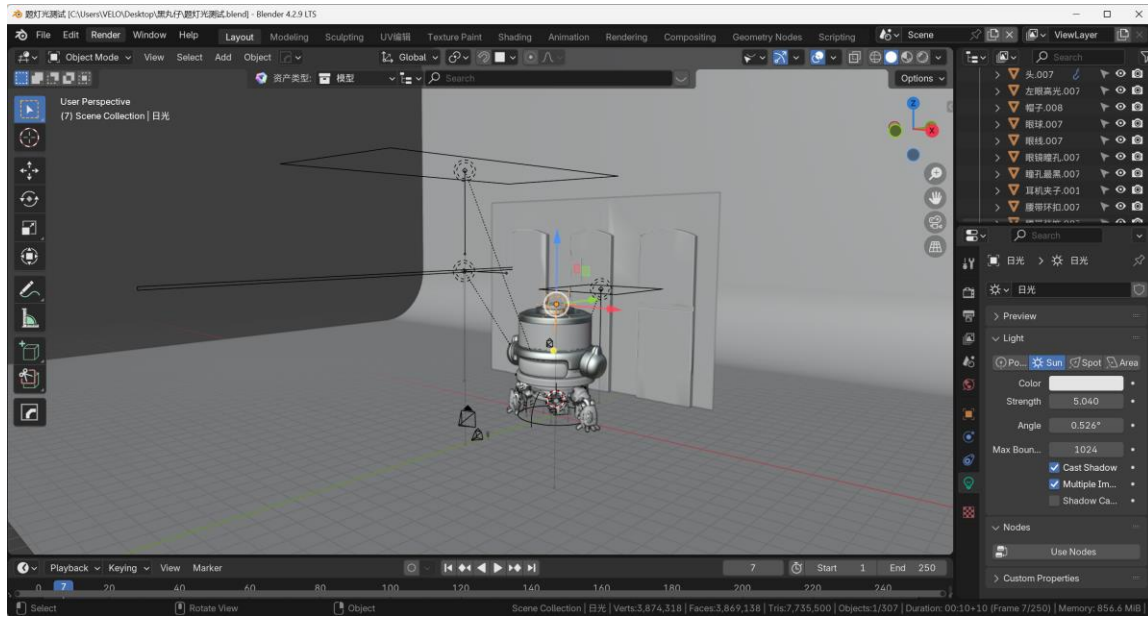
In this stage, I experimented with different material finishes using Blender's geometry nodes and shader editor. I tested various combinations of metallic, transparent, and glossy surfaces to explore how texture influences the emotional tone of the robot. The contrast between smooth and rough finishes helped me emphasize the tension between surface appeal and functional emptiness. These tests guided the final material choices in my outcome.





Sence and light

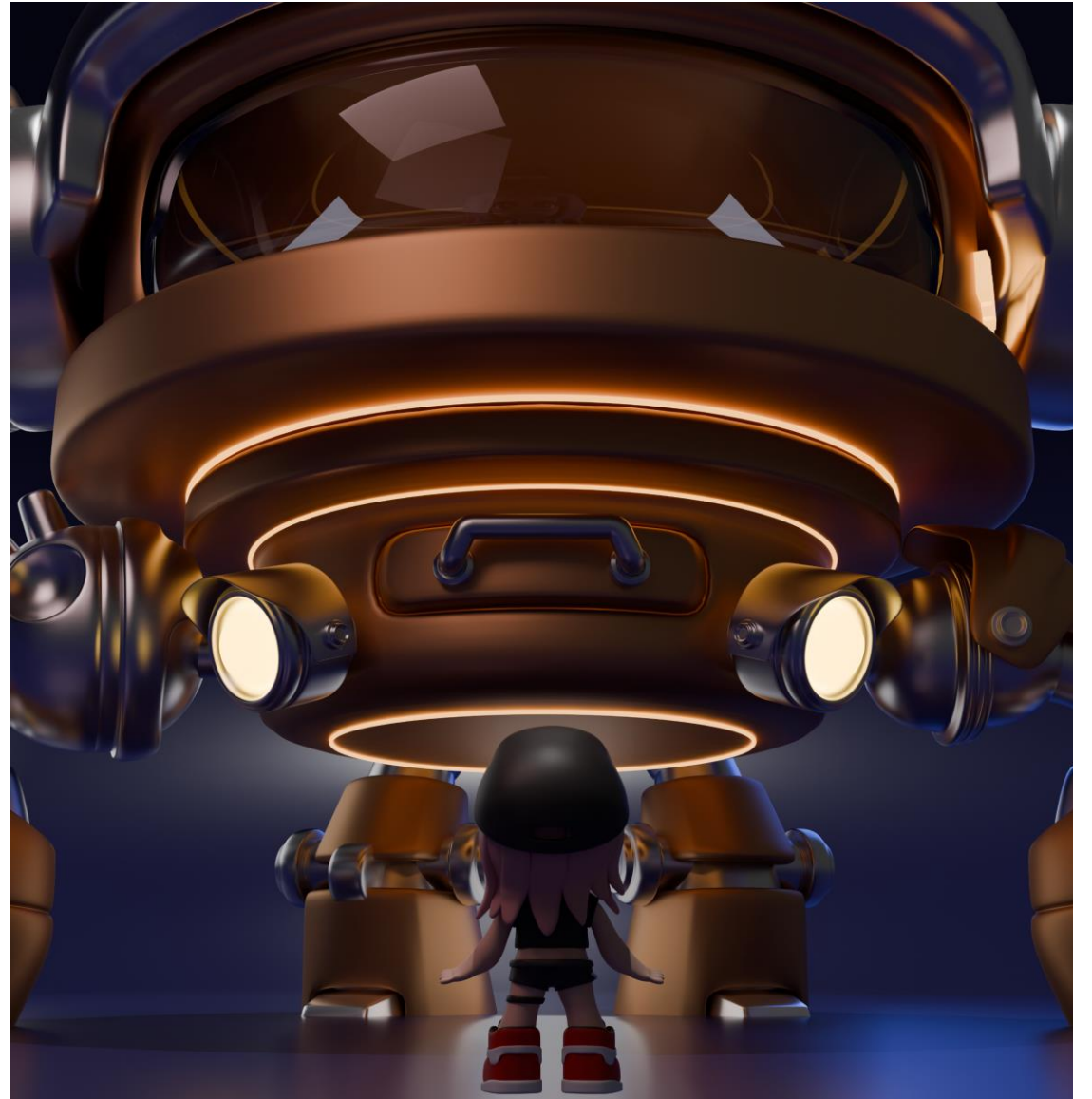




In this stage, I experimented with different scene setups in Blender to find a composition and lighting scheme that best supports the narrative. I tested various environments including an urban backdrop, and a snowy landscape. Each scene helped me explore how different visual contexts can shift the emotional tone and symbolic meaning of the robot. These tests also allowed me to adjust material reflections and camera angles to strengthen the final visual impact.



These are selected render tests that I found visually successful in terms of composition and lighting. Each view helped me understand how to emphasize the scale and presence of the robot while maintaining clarity in the internal scenes. I explored different camera angles, including frontal, low-angle, and rear perspectives, to highlight the symbolic tension between the character and the machine. Lighting was also adjusted to contrast warm interior tones with colder exteriors, reinforcing the staged, theatrical feel of the visual illusion I intended to critique.





OUTCOME



This is the main character in my project. The bold logo shirt is a deliberate choice—it shows how fashion today often values symbols more than actual design. It looks stylish, but it's mostly about surface and identity display. The large headphones seem cool, but they're exaggerated and useless. They represent how fashion often trades function for appearance.



This mobile castle, designed as part of my project, represents the constructed authority within the fashion system. In this shot, I deliberately used a low-angle perspective to highlight its overwhelming scale and presence. Authority doesn't always persuade—it dominates through size, form, and spectacle. We believe in it not necessarily because it is right, but because it feels too massive, too finished, too grand to question.

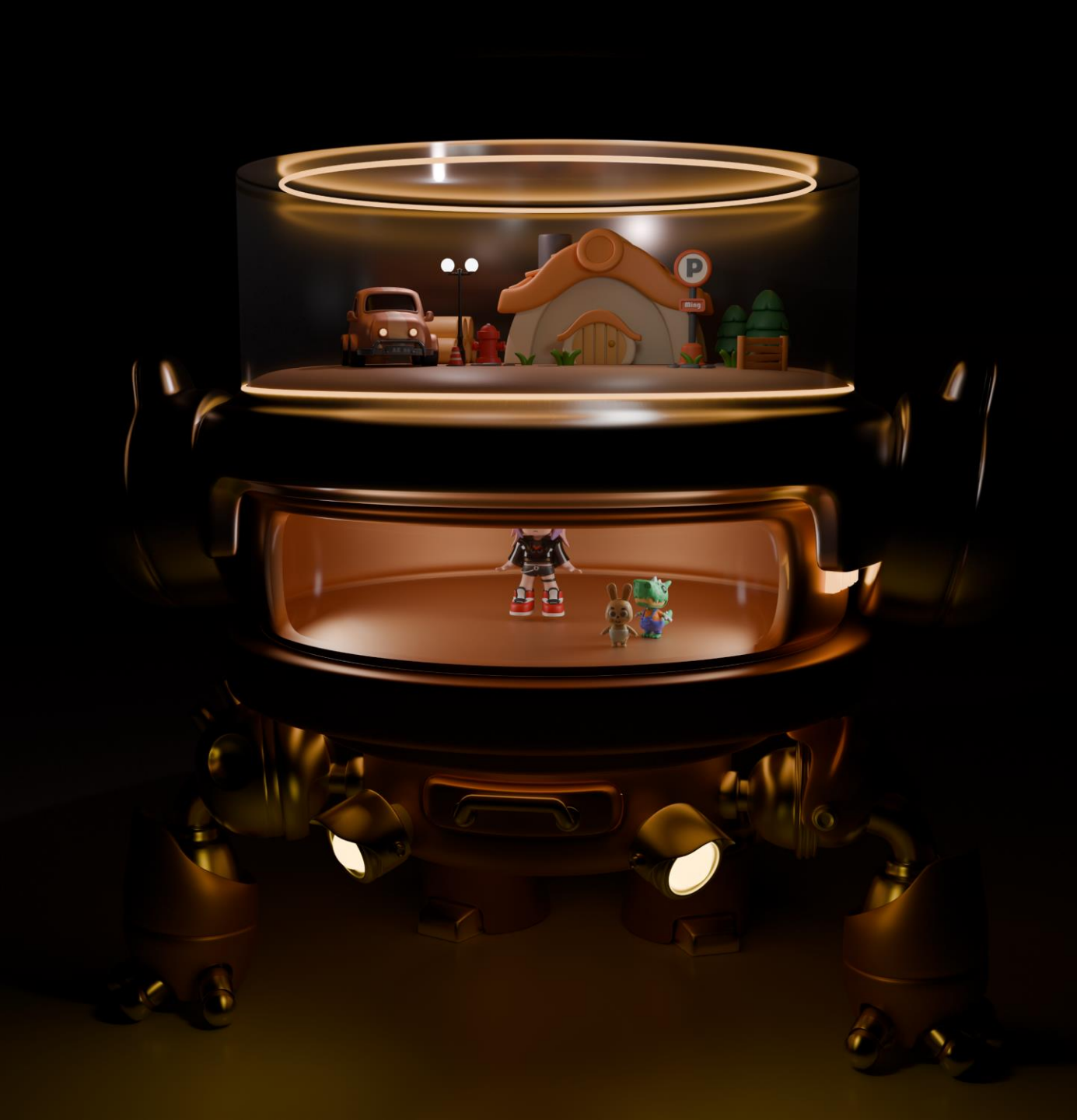


This image shows the girl fully absorbed by the fashion system. She stands in the lower glass box as a symbol to be watched. Above her is a fake ideal life, built to create a sense of happiness. The system gains power not by orders, but by looking perfect.



Ming

AE 86



The machine tries to disappear into the dark, avoiding exposure of its true nature.



This image was inspired by a set of Labubu figures I once collected. I really liked them at the time, but later I found them forgotten in a corner. It made me realize that many trend-driven products don't last. They are once seen as meaningful, but once the hype fades, the system quickly replaces them. In this image, the repeated bunny figures appear in different materials but similar forms. They represent a fast-moving system of authority that constantly creates symbols while discarding the old stories it once told.



This image shows another trend follower—a boy who starts chasing fashion just like the girl before him. He walks the same path, unaware that the system has already set the pattern. What feels new to him is actually a repeat. Fashion authority keeps people moving in circles, changing the surface but not the structure.

This project originated from a personal discomfort I experienced when wearing a pair of Balenciaga Trooper boots. The shoes looked powerful, almost sculptural, but were incredibly painful to wear. That contradiction sparked a question that later became the backbone of my graduation project: Why do people willingly accept discomfort, impracticality, or even absurdity in fashion, as long as it is labeled with authority? From that moment, my inquiry shifted from fashion as design to fashion as system. What I wanted to understand was not only the form, but the mechanism behind the formation of belief. As I began my early research, I noticed that what drives fashion's power is not necessarily the product itself, but the meaning attached to it. A logo, a collaboration, a visual narrative—all of these can elevate an ordinary object into something desirable. I explored how branding manipulates desire through repetition, scarcity, and symbolic value. During this phase, I also examined the rise of designer toys and collectibles like Bearbrick and Molly, which demonstrated how meaning can be layered over identical forms. A toy or shoe becomes fashionable not because it functions well, but because it has become part of a shared illusion. This led me to revisit classic allegories as a way to frame my critical perspective. Fables offer compact, symbolic narratives that can satirize human behavior. I initially explored multiple stories: The Tortoise and the Hare, as a metaphor for fast fashion versus slow fashion; The Fox and the Grapes, for the shifting of aesthetic logic; and most importantly, The Emperor's New Clothes, which ultimately became my main conceptual framework. I was drawn not to the ending of the story, but to its structure: an illusion accepted by all, not because it is convincing, but because everyone fears being the first to question it. I realized this mirrored the logic of fashion perfectly. In the world of high fashion, what matters is not comfort, practicality, or personal choice, but conformity masked as individuality. We follow trends not always because we like them, but because we fear being excluded from a symbolic system. This is especially visible in extreme or non-functional garments, which are often praised precisely because they challenge practicality. These items become a social test: Who understands? Who dares to question? Who stays silent? The next challenge was deciding how to visualize this system. I moved away from telling a linear story and instead focused on building symbolic scenes. Rather than designing a narrative with a beginning, middle, and end, I designed four moments that expose how the fashion system operates: a moment of fantasy, a moment of intimidation, a moment of absorption, and a moment of repetition. I found that this symbolic approach better suited my thematic focus. My goal was not to describe a character's journey, but to dissect the machine they are entering.

To support my visual design, I drew from my research into 1980s Japan, particularly the bubble economy era. Although my final scenes are not set in a specific time or place, I used the aesthetics of that period—its pastel color palettes, its dreamlike cityscapes, and its consumer optimism—as inspiration. This atmosphere helped me create a visual language that feels both artificial and alluring, like the illusion I was critiquing. I also looked at artists such as Hiroshi Nagai, whose city pop illustrations embody the hollow dream of prosperity. My visual work took the form of a colossal robot that functions not as a weapon, but as a mobile stage or fashion temple. It carries a transparent dome that houses a miniature world—carefully designed, sterile, and seductive. Viewers may initially think it is beautiful, even utopian. Only when the robot rises does its scale become clear. One by one, characters are absorbed into the system: not by force, but by seduction.

My character design includes a girl who becomes mesmerized by the miniature world and is eventually incorporated into the display. A boy then follows, suggesting the cycle continues indefinitely. In parallel, I also developed a collection of toy-like characters, including a chrome-finished rabbit, as part of my exploration into surface fetishization. These toys all share the same shape but differ in material. The point was to show that in consumer culture, surface variation is often enough to generate the illusion of diversity. The body stays the same, but the texture shifts. This critique of visual illusion helped me form the aesthetic logic of my final outcome. Throughout the process, I revised my approach multiple times. I initially considered combining three allegories into one narrative, but later decided that would weaken the conceptual clarity. I also changed the medium from animation to static rendering, because the static image allows more control over symbolism and framing. Each image became a constructed moment, where light, color, and composition work together to express a critical point. Not everything went smoothly. One recurring challenge was integrating fashion directly into the characters without being too literal or relying on real-world logos. I used brands like Supreme and CDG as visual design, because they are iconic examples of branding that thrives on surface value, perfectly aligning with my critique of fashion's symbolic authority. This project taught me that visual critique does not always require a traditional story. Sometimes, it requires building a system and allowing the audience to enter it piece by piece. My goal was not to expose a villain or victim, but to reveal a mechanism—one that constructs illusion, rewards silence, and feeds on repetition. Fashion, like the emperor's invisible clothes, depends on collective agreement. And sometimes, the most powerful act of critique is simply to show what has always been there, waiting to be seen.

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