

Emily Tsao '25

Project title: KODA My Chinese Life Series

Major: Product and Graphic Design

Minor(s): Psychology and Studio Art

Hometown: San Francisco, CA

Faculty Advisor: Jenny Kowalski, with special thanks to Ho'o Hee.

I am a designer and artist whose career interests lie in the intersection of product design, graphic design, and illustration. I'm inspired by the Japanese Superflat Movement, founded by Takashi Murakami, which reinterprets traditional "flat" art forms like manga and anime. Some artists in this movement my work draws from are Aya Takano and Yoshitomo Nara. Specifically, I am interested in making blind box figurines. Blind boxes typically contain sets of 4 to 12 toys, each showcasing a unique design of the same character, all connected by a common theme. The specific toy you receive is a surprise until you open the box. Popular themes include animals, food, hobbies, culture, and emotions. They are similar to gashapon toys—Japanese collectibles dispensed from vending machines.

My toy designs center around Koda, a character I created as an extension of myself. Originally developed through paintings and digital art, Koda has since evolved beyond two-dimensional representations into figurines. She represents my physical interpretation of childlike wonder and curiosity—always dreaming, with her head in the clouds. This series features six toy designs centered around Koda, all tied together by the theme of exploring cultural patterns, materials, and textures connected to my core memories—elements that have shaped both my identity and creative vision.