



Within and Beyond the Walls

Alicia Chai

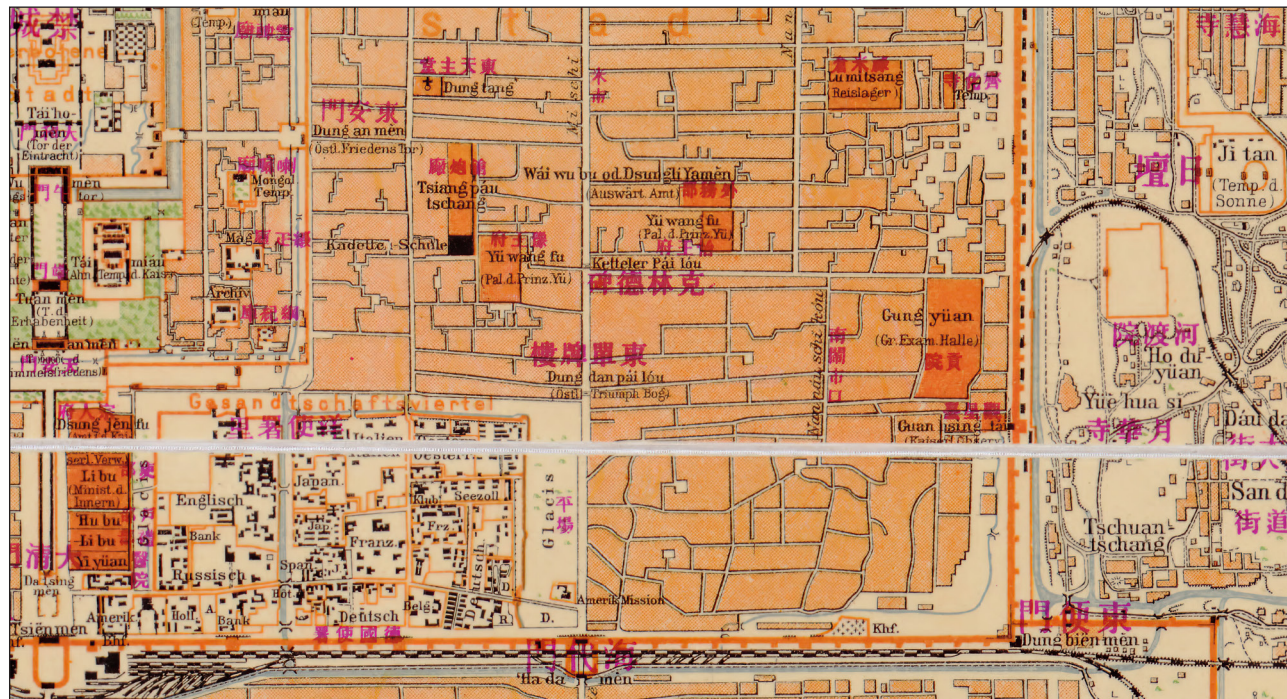
Dimension: 105X40X40cm

Type: Individual

Time: January 2025

Application in Sketch up \ Handmade Model

History of the Legation Quarter



Map3: "PEKING UND UMGEBUNG" drawn by Germany in 1907.



Map16: From the aerial map of Google Earth, May 2024.

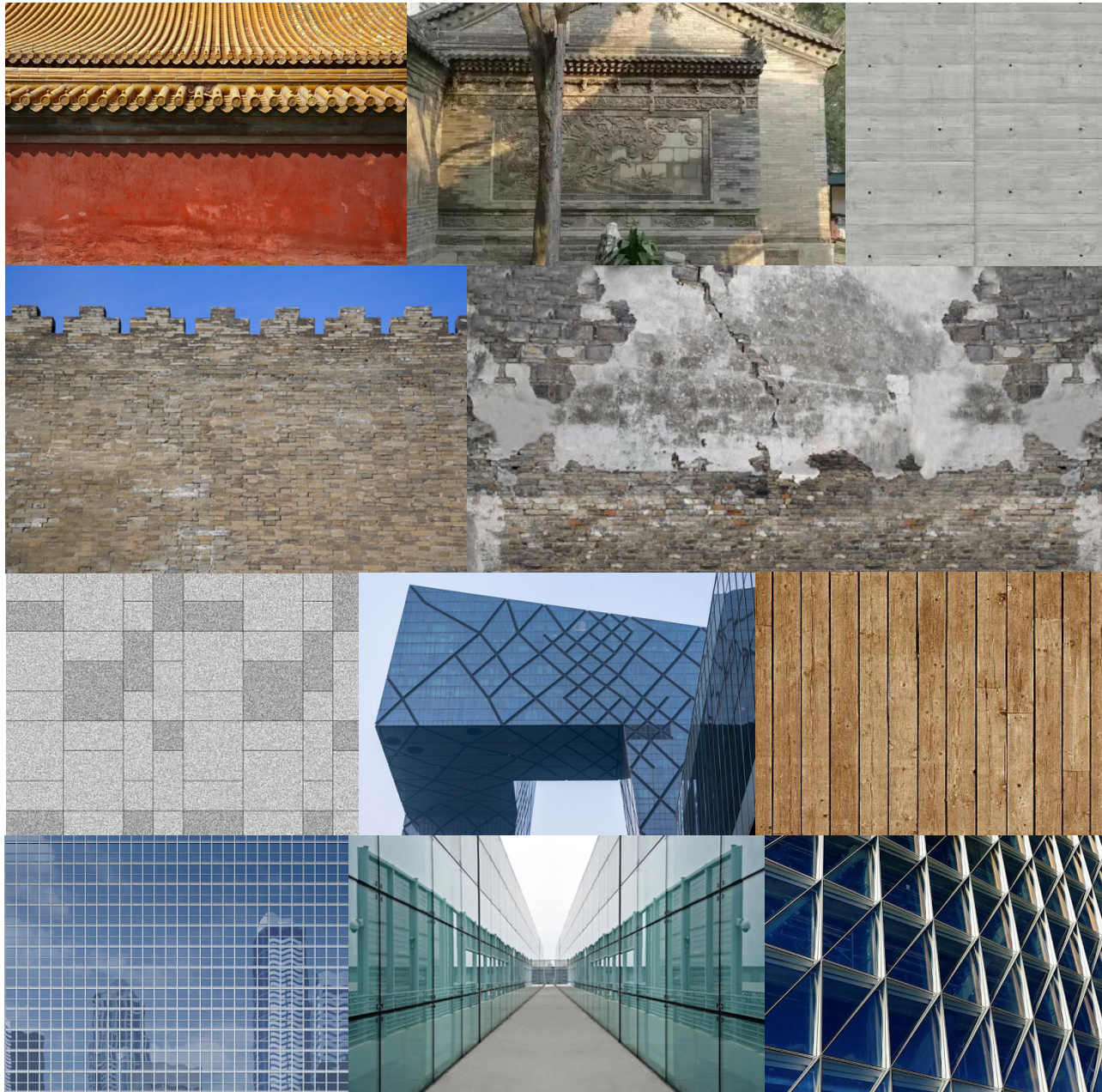
According to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961), the embassy area is considered the territory of the sending state. The wall clearly demarcates the boundaries of the embassy area, emphasizing that it is the sovereign territory of the foreign country. The embassy has a wall to meet the needs of security, privacy, legal protection and diplomatic functions, and is also a product of history, culture and geopolitics.

I grew up in the First Legation District in Beijing, and I am familiar with everything here. But when I took the First Legation District as a research object and consulted a lot of historical materials, I looked at everything around it and I had a new understanding. During the research, I focused on the “wall” in this area. The wall here carries the entire modern history of China.

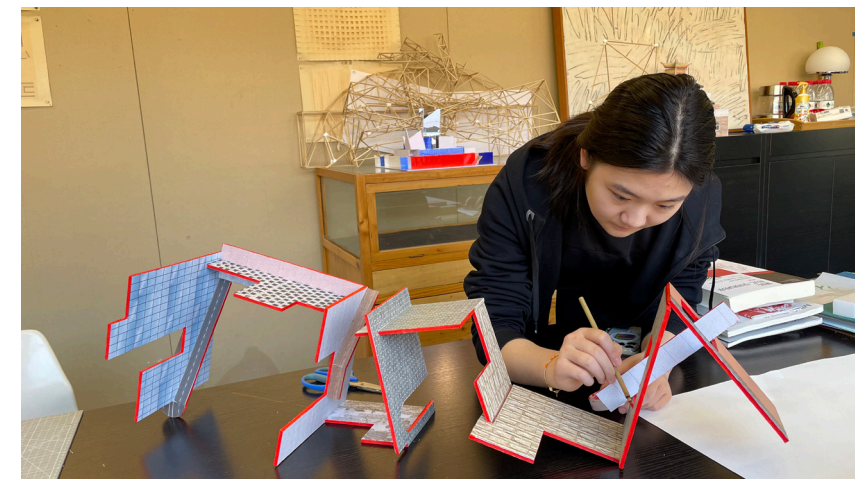
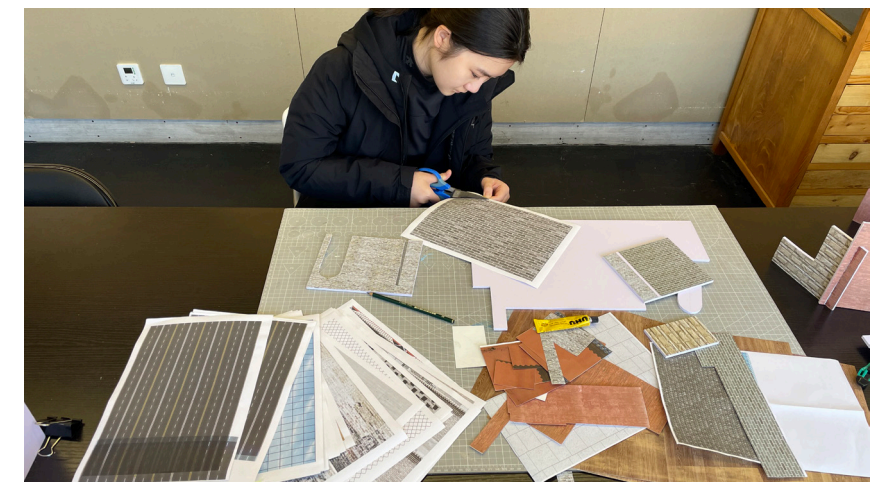
I found that there is a relative relationship between “openness” and “borders”. For example, Dongjiao-minxiang has always served as a legation district since the late Qing Dynasty to before the founding of the People’s Republic of China. At that time, there were the most fashionable buildings and the latest activities. But for a long time, it was a “restricted area” with thick stone walls and railings everywhere;

Beijing’s city walls protected Beijing’s safety for hundreds of years in wars throughout the dynasties, but in the early days of the construction of the People’s Republic of China, it was considered to restrict the development of modernization; the First Legation District in civilized society is rich and colorful. In modern international conventions, walls have become an indispensable part of the embassy, which not only protects the personnel and facilities in the embassy, but also safeguards the diplomatic interests and national image of the sending country. On the surface, the embassy district appears closed due to its walls, but the First Embassy District is one of the areas with the most intensive cultural exchanges in Beijing.

Walls.....



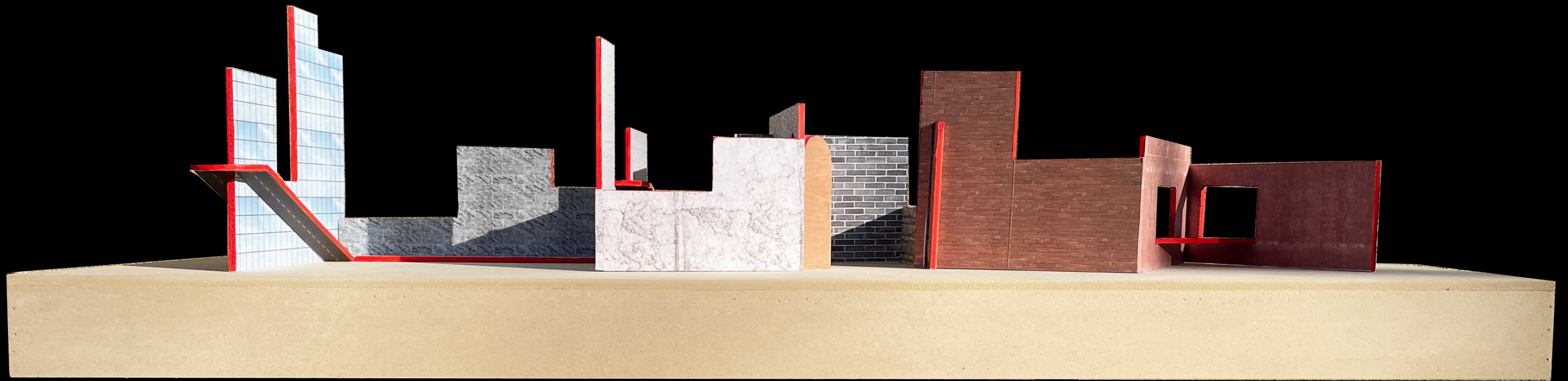
At the same time, the development of the times and technology can also be read from the materials of the wall, such as the red palace wall, the blue-gray courtyard brick wall, the Western stone wall, the weathered wall, the brand new wall, the wooden fence, the metal fence, the glass curtain wall of the high-rise building, the green intelligent curtain wall. The change in the material of the wall has become the most crucial element in my design works to represent the passage of time. With the narrative of the phenomenon of time passage, the form of the walls in the work also changes accordingly.



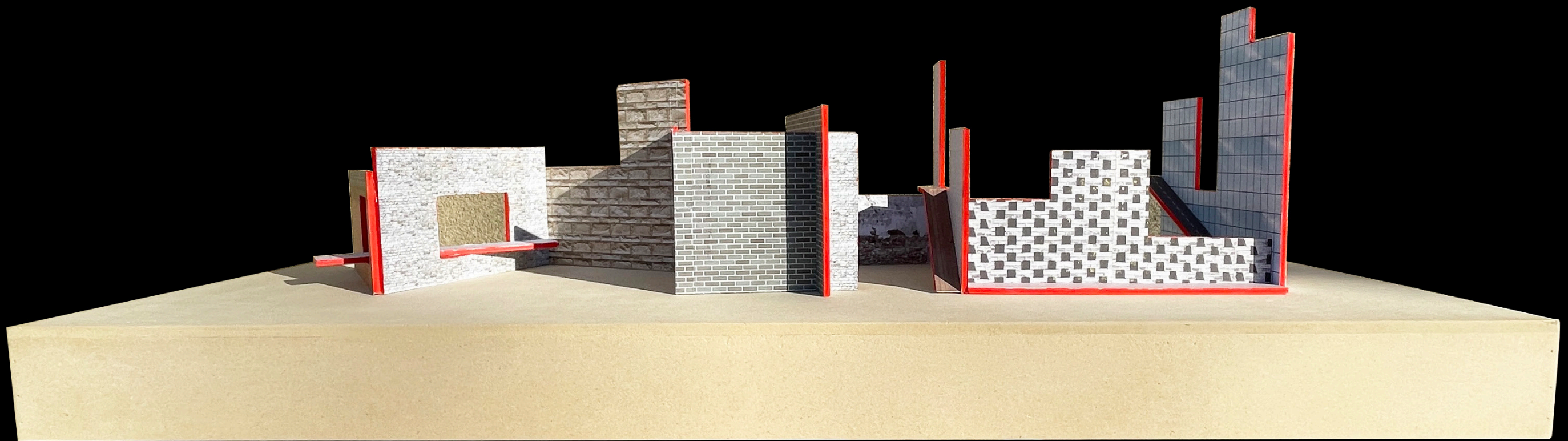
Model making process

I extracted the wall elements in the First Embassy District and combined them together in a spatial way to form a zigzag space. I painted the top of each wall red to emphasize the linear spatial narrative, which is a metaphor for the historical development of the First Embassy District.

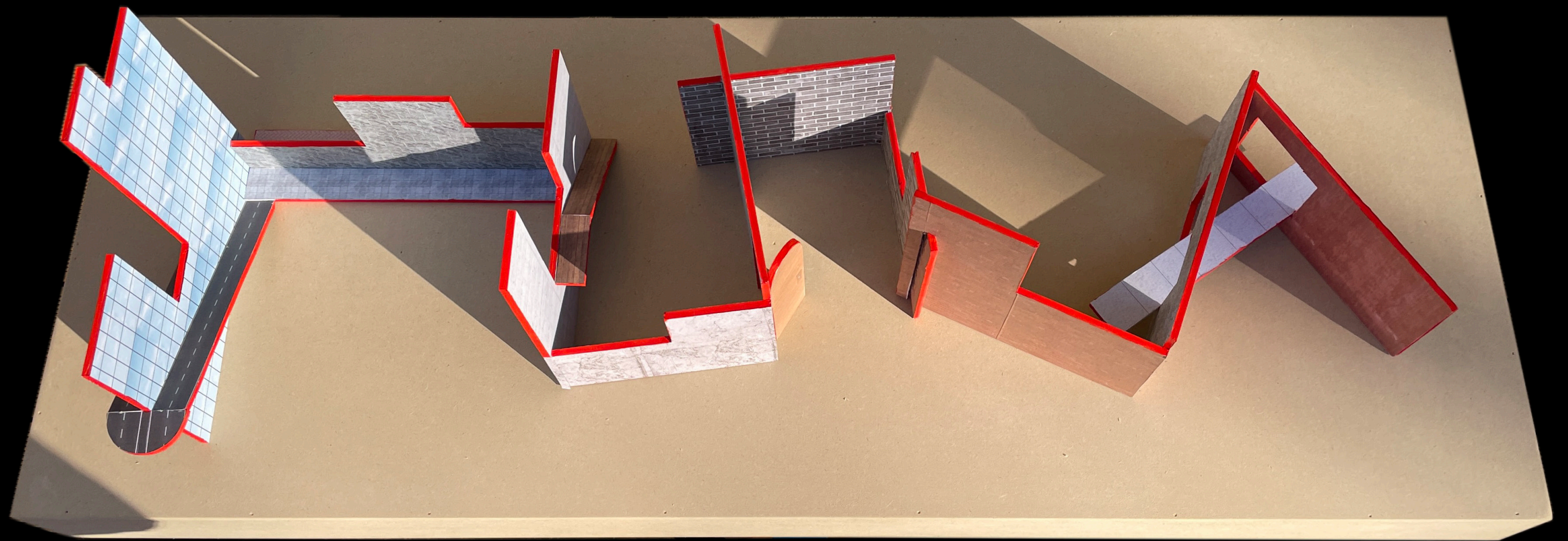
Linear Spatial Narrative



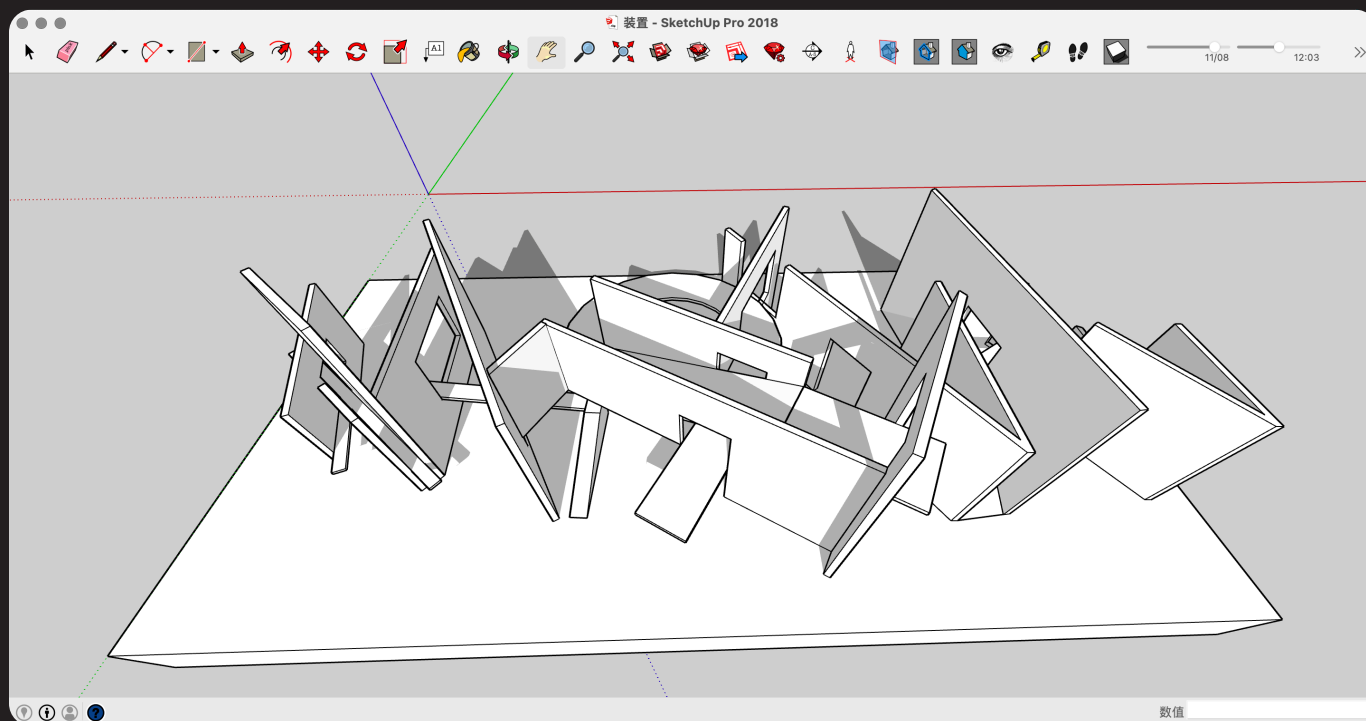
Model photo: South facade



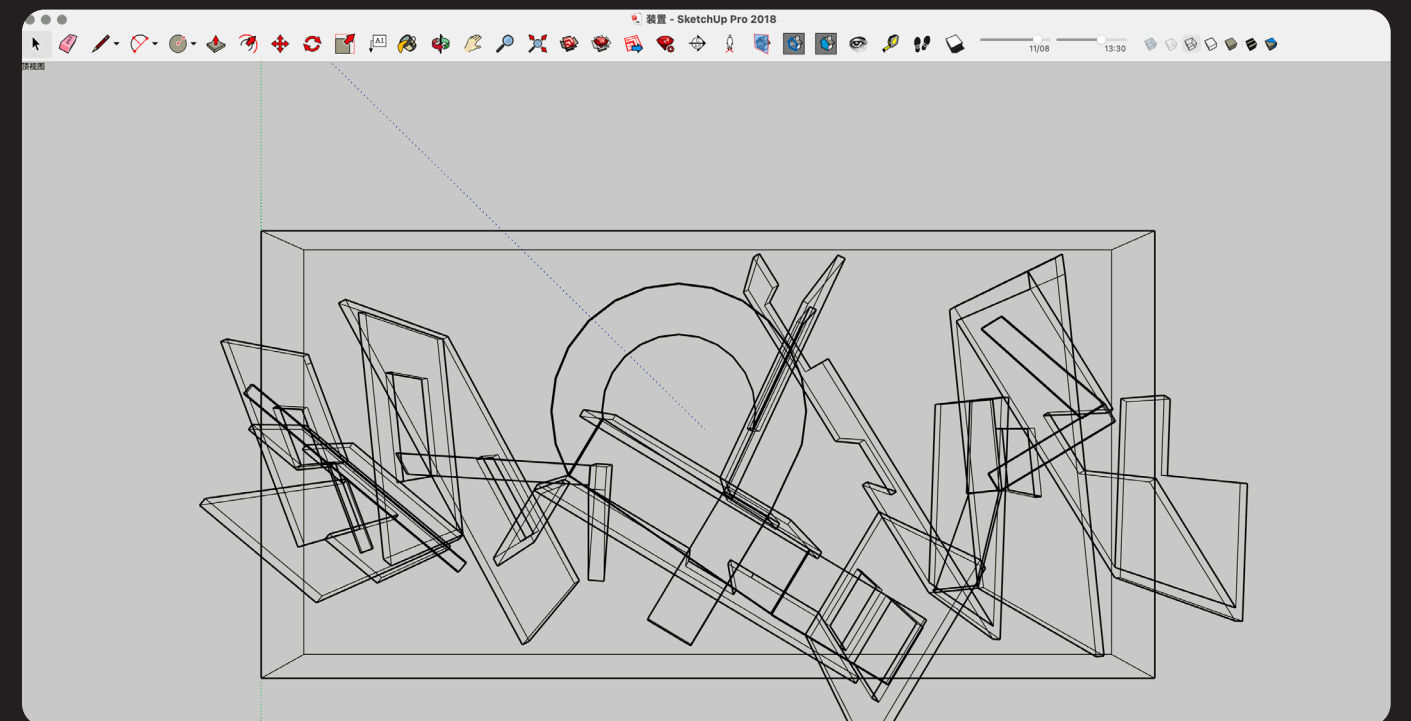
Model photo: North facade



Model photo: Top view



SketchUp modeling



SketchUp modeling



Looking at this entire process, from researching historical materials, planning out the book, drawing covers and illustrations, designing works, to finally forming a complete work. There is no doubt that I have deepened my understanding of the past and present of this embassy area around me.

