

3. Seeing Beyond the Glass



Back to contextual research...

Since last week's feedback, I decided to conduct further research on the London Zoo's Gorilla Kingdom.

When the Gorilla Kingdom first opened, its main attraction was Guy the Gorilla. In 1947, Guy was moved from the Paris Zoo in exchange for a tiger — yet records from that time are poorly documented. Between 1887 and 1908, ZSL had exhibited seven young gorillas, none of whom survived due to inadequate care and management.

1947 was also a period when people were still suffering from the privations and rationing of wartime, and the zoo offered a form of escapism for Londoners. For the zoo management, it was crucial to provide something new and exciting to draw visitors through the gates.

As historian Dr. Andy Flack notes, *"Guy was a very important star attraction who kept visitors coming through the gate."* The distance between the public and Guy was minimal — he was constantly visible, yet always confined.

After this research, I returned to the zoo to begin direct conversations with the staff and visitors.

One of the long-term ticket office staff members told me something that stayed with me: "ZSL treats this place like a theme park."

I also spoke with several mothers' groups who visit regularly. They mentioned that the distance between gorillas and visitors used to be much smaller, allowing people to see them far more closely than they can now.



Through this, I realised that Gorilla Kingdom has always been designed primarily around human excitement rather than the gorillas themselves — a space filled with raised voices, curiosity, and spectacles curated to entertain.

The gorillas, meanwhile, are simply there, like fish behind aquarium glass or rides in an amusement park: passive, confined, and silently watched. At times, they even appear like prisoners in a visitation room, while on the other side of the plastic barrier, visitors act like estranged lovers, pouring out emotion that drifts away into the noise, unanswered.

I began to sense that the dialogues and gazes exchanged within the Gorilla Kingdom do not connect with the gorillas at all — instead, they deepen their isolation and separation.

This realisation led me to explore new visual ways to represent that emotional distance and disconnection, continuing my investigation into what it truly means to see. To visualise this understanding, I began experimenting with different ways of translating these observations — testing how sound, gaze, and distance could take form through visual language.



Method of investigating 1:

3D space model

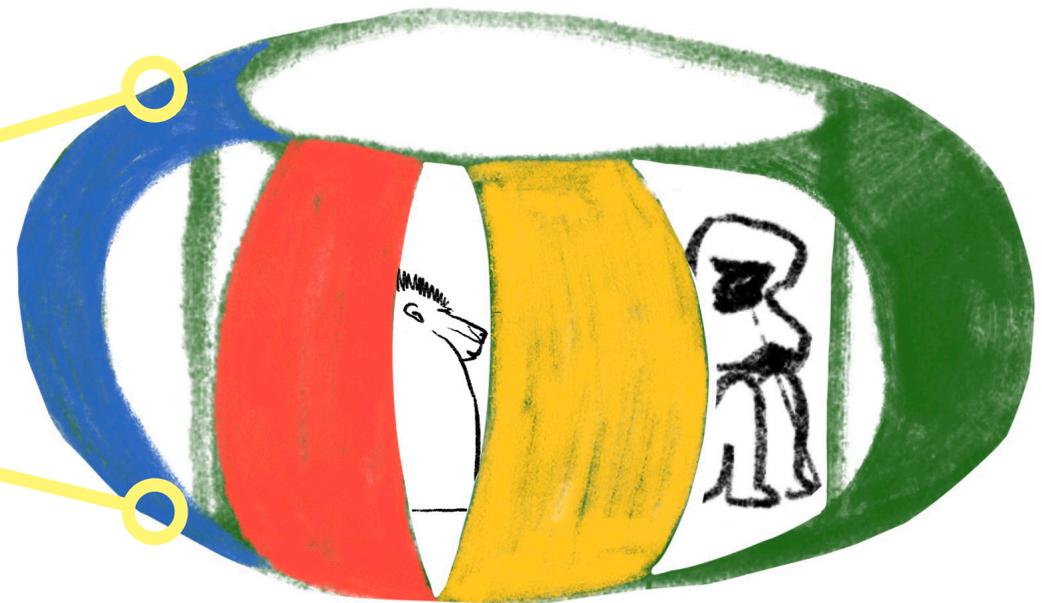
1. 3D space model

My first visualisation experiment began with a 3D model — an attempt to capture the image of the gorillas, trapped and silenced inside their enclosure while the human world around them bursts with sound and chatter.



Before building it, I started with quick planning sketches to visualise how this sense of confinement and noise could take shape in space.

Colourful sound strips run vertically, surrounding gorillas which are printed in black and white. Almost like a prison/cage isolating them from the world.



As I rotated the structure, the gorillas gradually appeared behind layers of noisy sound strips, revealing themselves only through the gaps between the colours and shapes.



Method of investigating 2:

Digital weaving

For my second method, I tried **digital weaving on Procreate** for easier modification. I tested designs that were impossible to make physically — placing loud sounds above the images, readable texts in front, and overlapping noises that happened at the same time.

Based on last week's feedback, which suggested using unequal box sizes, I adjusted the scale and proportion of each grid as I worked, creating a more dynamic and irregular visual rhythm.



Method of investigating 3:

W|L|a|v|i|n|g| t|o| c|o|d|e|

For my final method, **Weaving to Cage**, inspired by my view of the Gorilla Kingdom as an isolated, prison-like space. Images fell vertically, conversations ran horizontally, and loud noises sliced diagonally across the surface.

Reflecting the wooden spatial structure of the Gorilla Kingdom, I chose to weave the design on top of cardboard, turning the surface itself into a symbolic cage.

