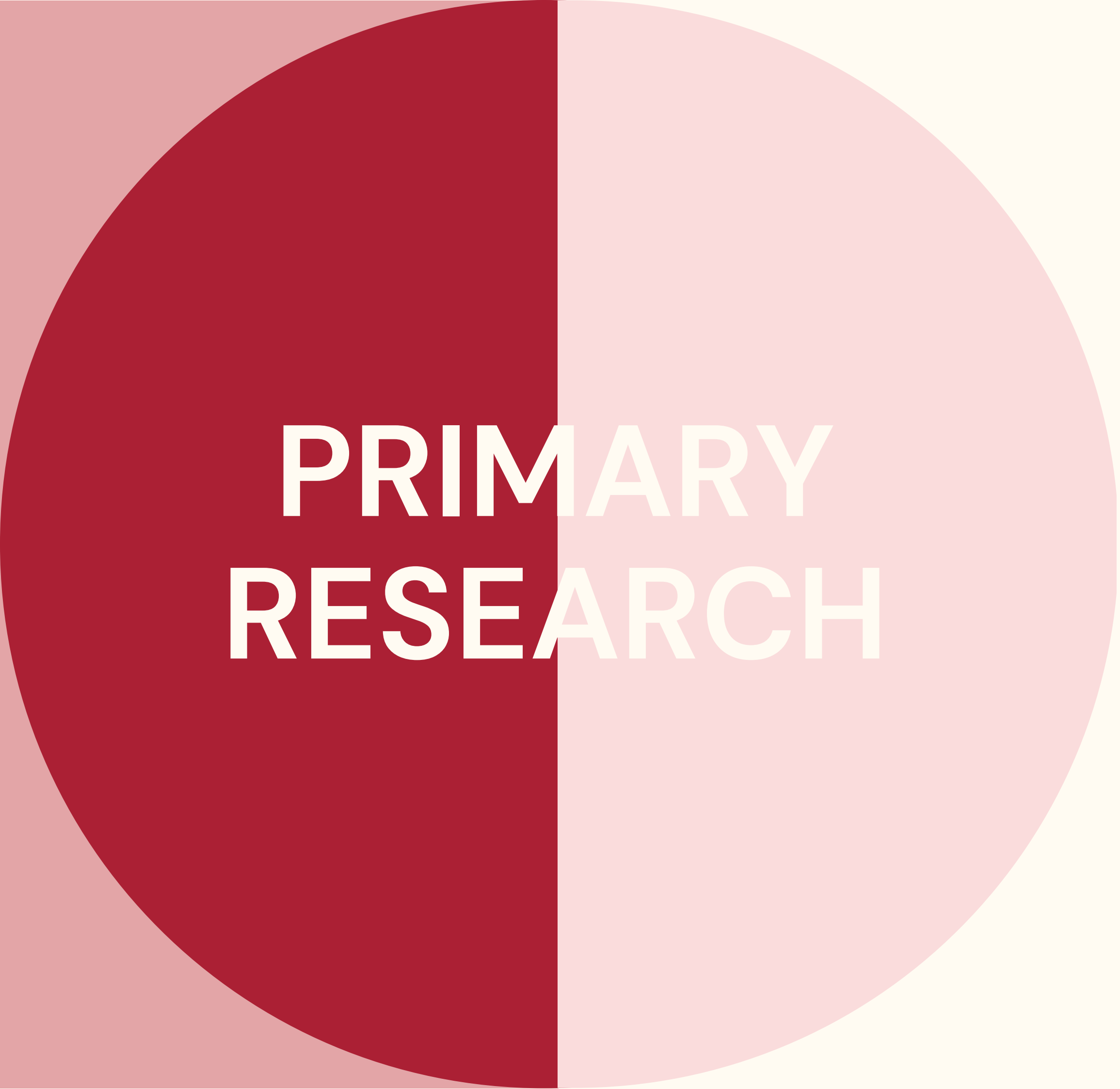




PRIMARY RESEARCH

A VISIT TO THE GRAND EGYPTIAN MUSEUM

GIZA

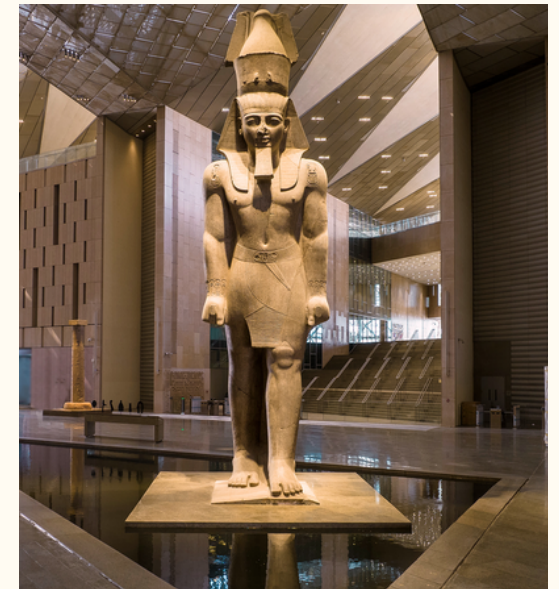
As part of my primary research, I visited the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM)—a state-of-the-art cultural institution that reimagines how history is preserved and presented for contemporary audiences. Situated near the iconic Pyramids of Giza, the GEM is not only a tribute to Egypt's ancient legacy but also a reflection of modern aspirations in museum design.

This visit held special significance for me as both an Egyptian and a designer. It allowed me to explore how a museum rooted in one of the world's oldest civilisations is leveraging modern design principles to create spaces that resonate with today's global audience. By contrasting the GEM's innovative approach to museum design with the long-established Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), I gained insights into how different cultural and historical contexts influence the way museums craft visitor experiences, design spatial narratives, and anticipate the evolving needs of their audiences.

WHY THE GEM?

The Grand Egyptian Museum is a pioneering project purposefully designed for the modern era, making it an ideal case study for this research. It combines an appreciation for ancient artefacts, housing over 100,000 treasures, including Tutankhamun's complete collection with a forward-thinking approach to storytelling and visitor experience.

Unlike the V&A, which has evolved over centuries to meet changing visitor expectations, the GEM has been designed from the ground up to anticipate the needs of 21st-century visitors. Its design incorporates spacious layouts, cutting-edge architectural elements, and an intentional focus on how physical and emotional journeys shape visitor experiences. By exploring the GEM, I plan on discovering if newly built institutions approach visitor engagement differently from historic museums and how their design solutions address universal challenges like fatigue, overstimulation, and creating connections with art and history.



MY OBJECTIVE:

- **Understand the User's Emotional Journey:** Explore the visitor experience from entry to exit, how the GEM's design impacts the physical and emotional journey of its visitors.
- **Investigate Modern Museum Solutions:** Examine how the GEM, as a modern museum, addresses challenges such as overstimulation, accessibility, and creating opportunities for more visitor engagement, compared to historic institutions like the V&A.
- **Analyse Visitor-Centric Design:** Observe how seating and spatial design at the GEM address a better user experience.
- **Discover Design Opportunities:** Identify innovative solutions from the GEM that can inform my project, particularly in creating adaptable, empathetic furniture that enhances visitor well-being and complements diverse museum contexts.

MY PLAN:

- **Autoethnography**
- **Empathetic User Journey Mapping** (from entry to exit)
- **Seating Design Analysis**
- **Body Storming** (testing out the seating available in the museum when and how to use it)
- **Behavioural Analysis**
- **Interviews** (more casual conversations in comparison to my initial interviews to test out if different approaches will get different insights)

USER JOURNEY MAP – VISITING THE GEM

During my visit to the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM), I immersed myself in the perspective of someone navigating the museum while struggling with mental health challenges, such as social anxiety, sensory overload, or emotional fatigue. This approach allowed me to deeply empathise with visitors who may find such experiences overwhelming, helping me identify key pain points and moments of delight within the museum journey. The aim was to uncover opportunities for design interventions that make museums more inclusive and supportive for all visitors.

1. TICKET CHAOS



2. GRAND ENTRANCE



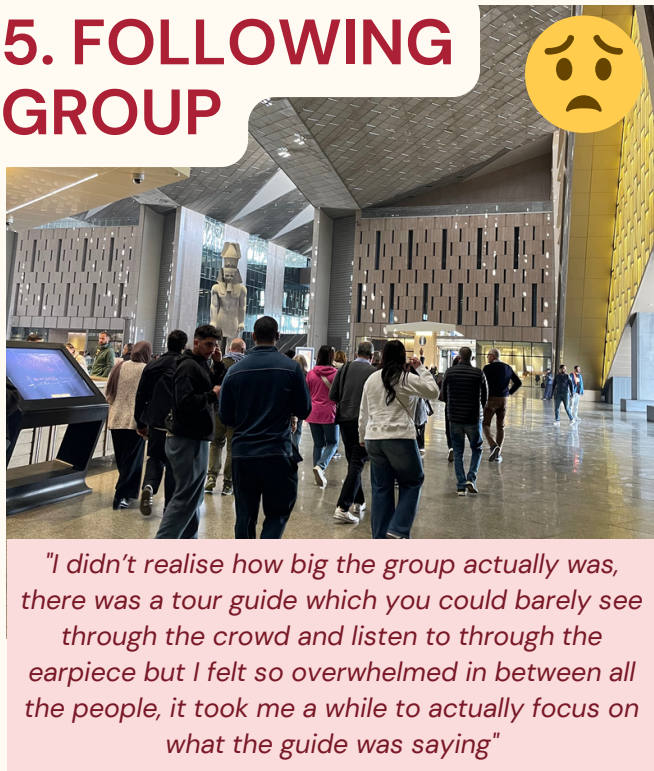
3. LIMITED OPTIONS



4. STARTING TOUR



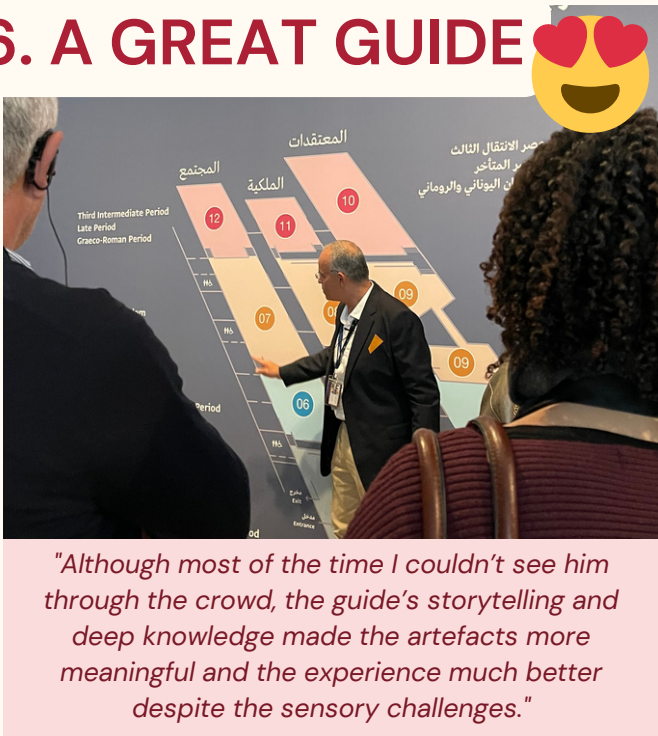
5. FOLLOWING GROUP



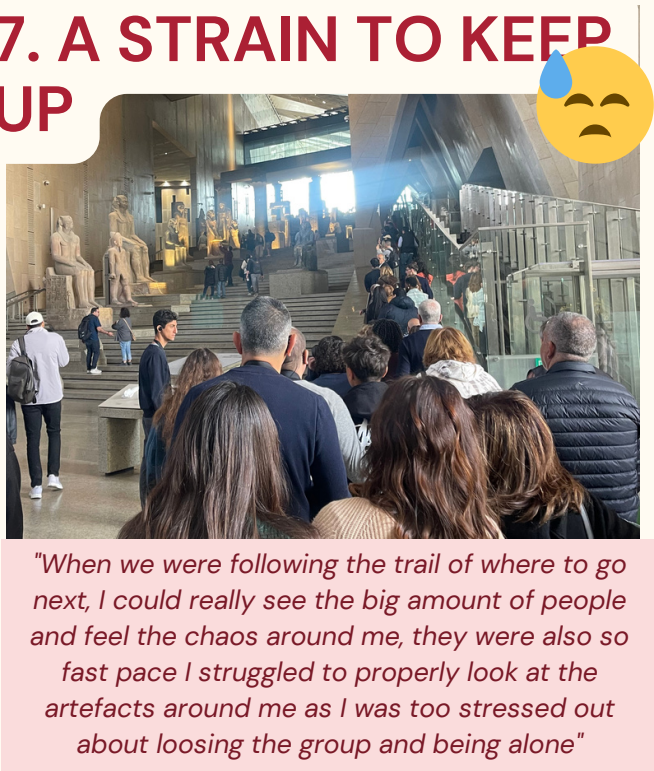
5. BEAUTY IN THE CHAOS



6. A GREAT GUIDE



7. A STRAIN TO KEEP UP



USER JOURNEY MAP – VISITING THE GEM

8. SEEKING REST



"I started to feel so mentally and physically drained, I kept looking around at where I could possibly take a break but the only seating I could see was so far away from the main exhibits"

9. OVERSTIMULATING



"As this a new museum I thought they would have innovative ways of learning about the artefacts but the only different thing I spotted was this screen tunnel, it was possibly one of the worst things to look at when already feeling tired, the flashing bright overstimulating lights really didn't add to the experience"



"The museum was so grand and had so much to see in every corner, I needed to pause for a minute but the first seating I noticed was in a very overstimulating space I had to move away to be able to continue the tour, I didn't want to sit there it was the opposite of calming."

11. ESCAPING FOR A MOMENT



"Eventually, I stepped aside and sat on an isolated bench, far away from everything. It wasn't ideal, but I needed a moment."

12. REMOVING THE EARPIECE



"I had to remove the earpiece as the constant flow of information became too much to handle even when I was stood away from the tour"

13. NOTICING THE CONTRAST



"When I finally found a moment of peace, the view of the pyramids reminded me how beautiful the experience could be if only it were calmer This quiet moment made me realise how much I needed space to reflect and connect with what was in front of me."



14. END OF THE TOUR



"Overall the experience was pretty overwhelming and I couldn't wait to go home but it was meaningful in parts, it left me thinking about how much better it could have been with more thought to user needs."

USER JOURNEY MAP

FINDINGS

Big Emotional Strain on museum visitors due to overstimulation, crowds, poor pacing and overwhelm impacting the overall museum experience

Design Impact although the museum's spatial design creates moments of grandeur it fails to sustain user comfort or alleviate emotional fatigue throughout the journey

Very Overstimulating due to bright screens and crowded tours heighten sensory overload, making it harder to focus and engage with exhibits meaningfully.

Lack of Accessibility poor seating placement and limited rest areas fail to accommodate diverse visitor needs, especially for those seeking quiet reflection.

Engagement Gaps Visitors struggle to connect deeply with exhibits due to fast-paced tours and insufficient opportunities for individual exploration

Moments of Calm when visitors find quiet spaces or reflective moments, the experience becomes significantly more meaningful

Furniture Gaps with existing seating solutions are far from exhibits, isolated, and fail to contribute to user well-being or emotional relief

OPPORTUNITIES

HMW create a more inclusive and less overwhelming experience from the entry to exit

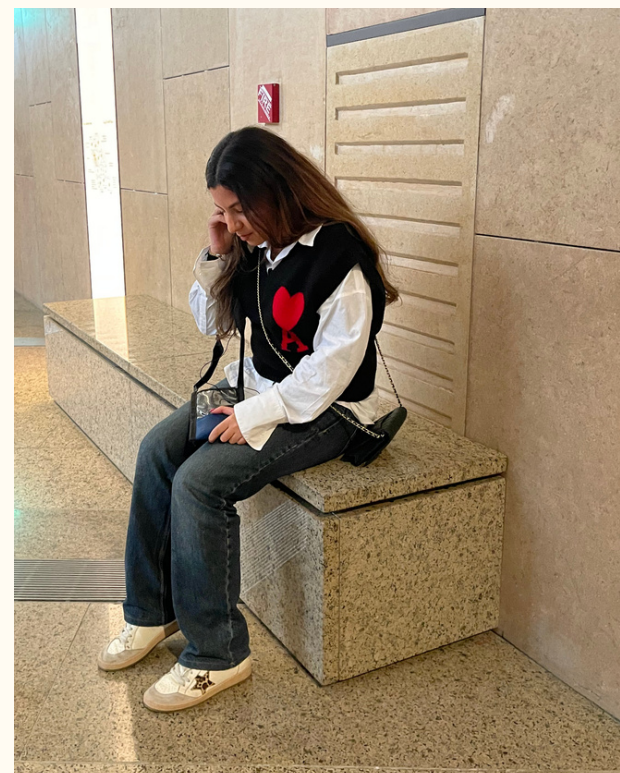
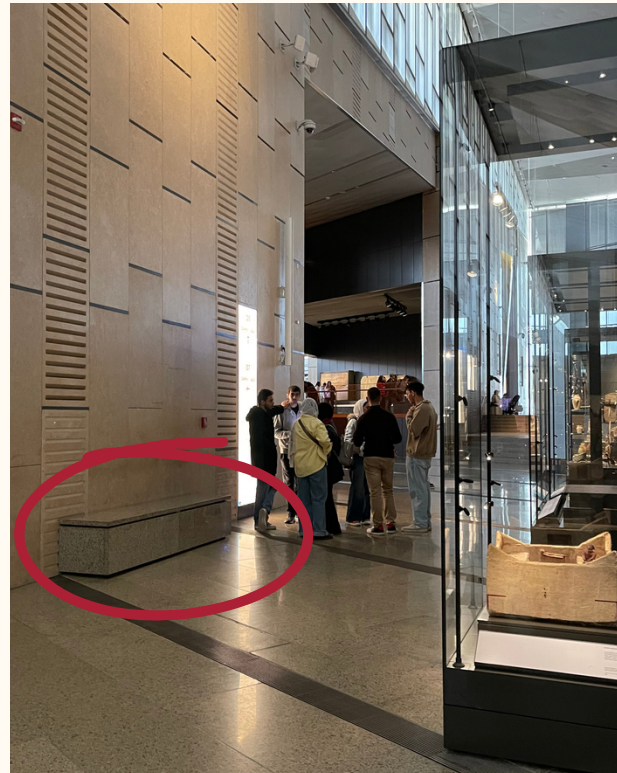
HMW seamlessly integrate furniture that blends with exhibits to provide accessible, calming, and reflective spaces throughout the museum

HMW reduce overstimulation using furniture design o promote visitor well-being and enhance emotional connection with the museum experience

HMW incorporate accessible rest areas near exhibits to reduce physical and emotional fatigue

HMW create thoughtful spatial contrasts that balance engaging exhibits with serene zones for reflection and connection

SEATING AT THE GEM OBSERVATIONAL RESEARCH



FINDING

INSIGHT

Seating areas are sparse and disconnected from exhibits, making it difficult for visitors to rest without feeling removed from the experience

The lack of integrated seating contributes to physical fatigue and emotional detachment

Seating is cold hard marble, angular, and lacks ergonomic consideration or visual appeal

Uncomfortable seating discourages extended use and does not provide a calming or reflective experience

Seating does not orient users toward exhibits or the architectural elements of the museum

Designing seating that directs attention to exhibits or architectural features could enhance the reflective experience

Visitors were observed sitting with visibly tired or distressed expressions, often looking away from exhibits

Seating design should address both physical comfort and emotional well-being

The museum's impressive spaces lack seating that encourages connection with the surrounding environment.

Integrating furniture that complements the environment can create a more immersive and engaging visitor journey

KEY INSIGHTS FROM MY VISIT TO THE GEM

With no quiet or intentional spaces to pause, reflect, or process the overwhelming amount of visual and historical information visitors tend to feel very rushed during the experience

A DOMINATING RUSHED FEELING

Seating positioned far from exhibits, against walls or in corners, making it feel disconnected from the museum experience.

DISCONNECTED SEATING DUE TO PLACEMENT

Bright, harsh lighting, crowded galleries, loads of information and things to see create sensory overload, particularly for visitors seeking a calmer experience.

EVERYTHING ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT IS OVERSTIMULATING

The current seating design feels generic and utilitarian, failing to connect emotionally or aesthetically with the museum's cultural narrative.

DISCONNECTED DESIGN

The reliance on guided group tours restricts visitors' freedom to navigate and engage with exhibits at their own pace. This creates a sense of pressure and reduces the opportunity for self-directed exploration and reflection.

RESTRICTED AUTONOMY

Seating does not sufficiently cater to diverse user needs, such as those of older visitors or individuals with mobility challenges.

INCLUSIVITY GAPS

Visitors commonly use their phones when seated, highlighting missed opportunities to create spaces that encourage mindfulness and deeper engagement.

BEHAVIOURAL OBSERVATIONS

Seating clusters are often fully occupied, leaving other visitors to lean against walls or sit on the floor.

This visit underscored the need for seating that is not just functional but also transformative. The insights reveal that the design must foster emotional connections, promote mindfulness, and enhance visitor engagement with the museum's exhibits. Addressing these gaps can create seating solutions that go beyond physical rest to shape meaningful visitor journeys.

REFLECTING ON PRIMARY RESEARCH

SO FAR...

Based on my primary research so far, I have gained valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities in designing museum seating for reflection, rest, and emotional connection. Observing the GEM and V&A has provided insights into the emotional and physical journeys of visitors, particularly those navigating overstimulation or seeking calm moments to connect with art.

While these insights are critical, they primarily highlight the gaps and shortcomings in existing solutions. To build on this, I recognize the need to deepen my understanding of how design principles can address these gaps effectively. This requires input from experts with a nuanced perspective on furniture and spatial design.



NEXT STEP

I plan to **interview furniture and interior designers** to explore how they balance functionality and aesthetics in cultural spaces. I'll focus on how seating can visually align with the environment while supporting diverse needs, strategies for layouts that accommodate reflection and social interaction, and features that enhance comfort, durability, and engagement.

These interviews will provide practical insights to translate my research into impactful design concepts. By incorporating expert perspectives, I can ensure my final design is empathetic, adaptable, and meaningful in enhancing the museum experience.