

01

An enquiry into
the 'Palimpsest'
of Camden Passage-
and its practices
of consumption

Methods of Investigating

MADE IN JAPAN / FABRIQUÉ AU JAPON / FABRICADO EN JAPÓN

Getting Started

For this first assignment, I wanted newer methods of 'seeing' by **trying mediums that are not natural to my practice**. For eg, photography - and within it, newer ways like distributing subjects with colours and texture.

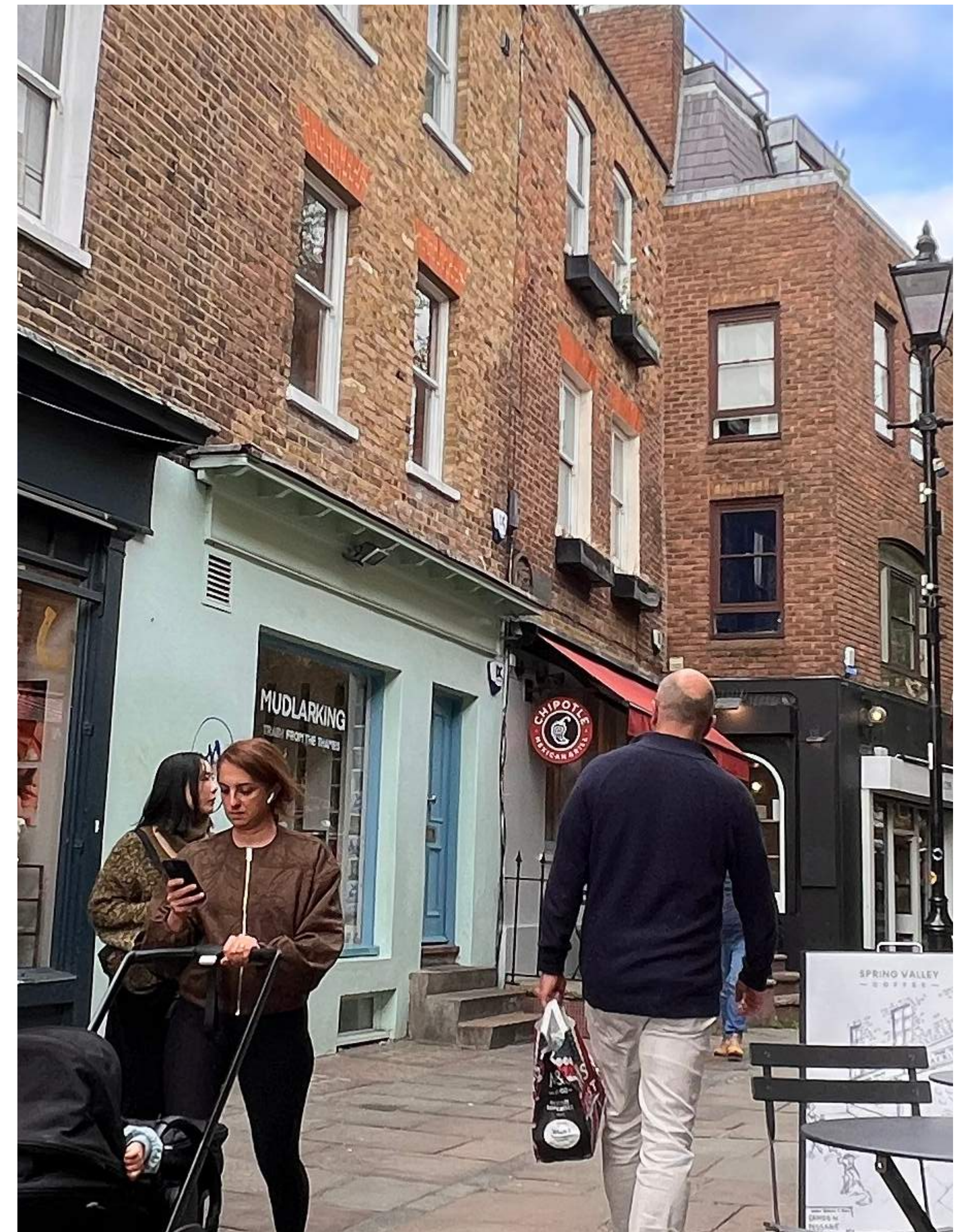
For my location, I chose 'Camden Passage,' a narrow walkway lined with boutique shops and cafes near Angel, Islington.

As a newcomer to London at the time, I wanted to explore this location to **understand the contrast in the picture-perfect fantasy of a city like London with its actual reality**.

While the lane of Camden Passage is lined with many, many stores, **I started my experiments by focussing on the open antique and secondhand wares market**, especially *Pierrepoint Antiques*.

The sinophilic stores display a large collection of blue and white porcelain artefacts, large calligraphic prints and Buddha statues under a blanket-branding of East Asian curiosities. **Stephanie*, the proprietor, let me photograph her store** (while adamantly refusing to let me take her picture)

*She spoke perfect Italian, English with a distilled British accent, and a bit of French. Goes to show how many layers exist within the place - embodying the diversity of London.



Snapshot of Camden Passage on a Monday afternoon

Early Experiments

1

In the antique market was a display of china, saturated with antique glazed porcelain and opaque colour pigments. **How do you sort what you're seeing in a busy room?** I tried photographing them with **B&W filter only selectively choosing colour**, and sorting them in primary colours.

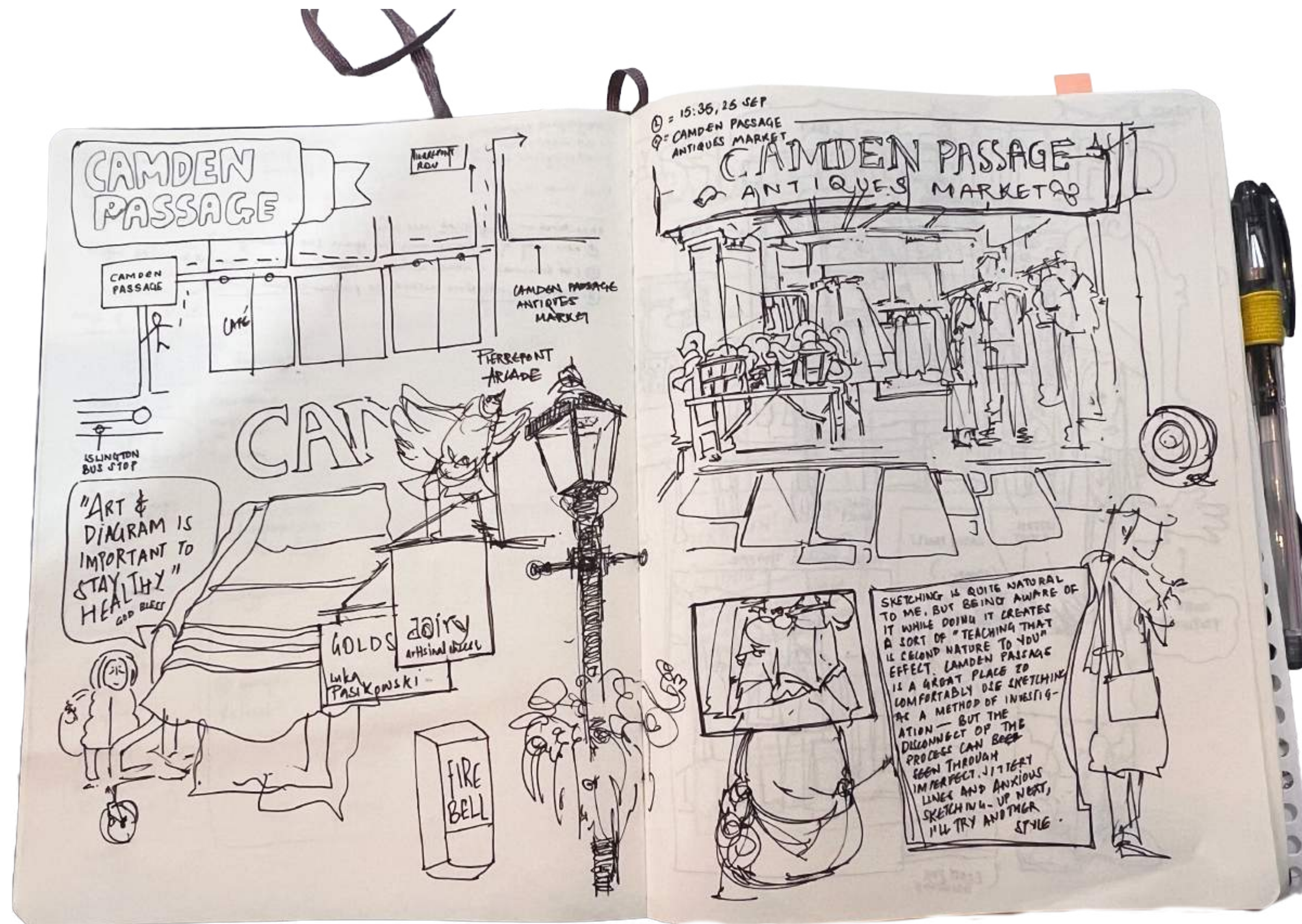


*Instead of shooting regularly, I started use filters on my camera to challenge my “**ways of seeing**”*

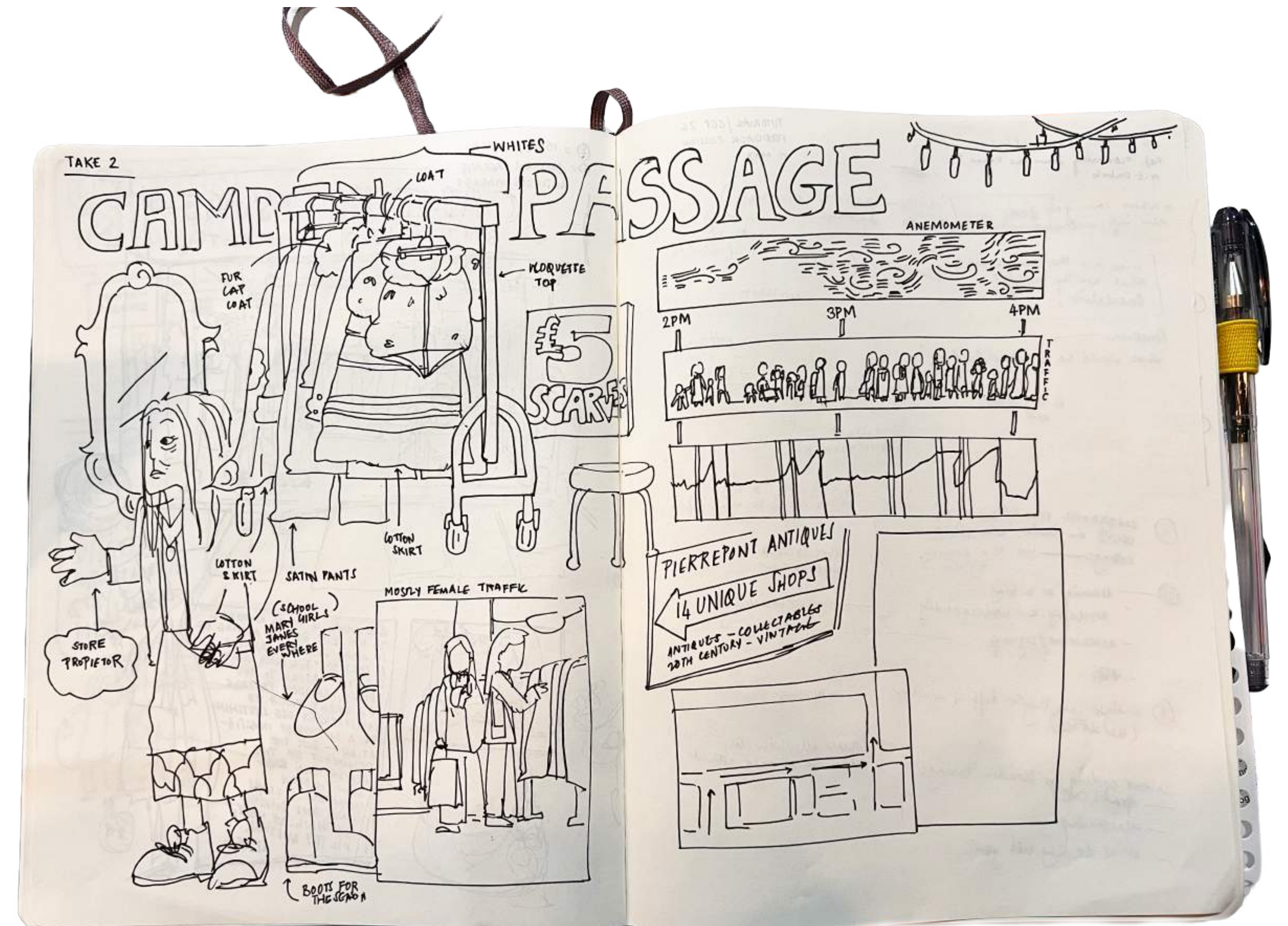


Distilling the visual details into categories of blue, red and yellow.

Early Experiments



The first attempt was messier, and it reminded me of Perec's quote in his book **Species of Spaces**, under the topic of exploring Foreign Towns (which was precisely my case): "You don't know what to look at."

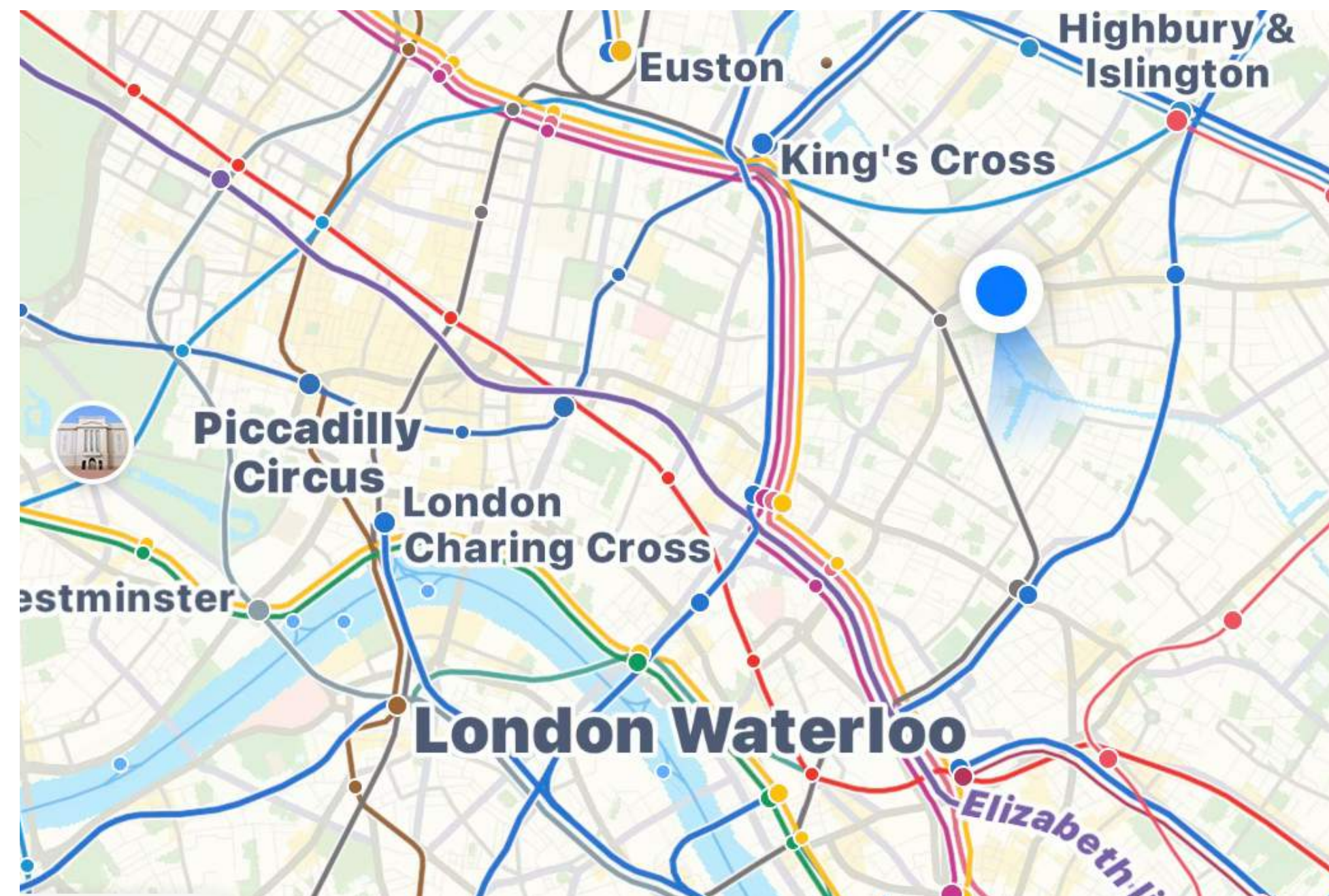
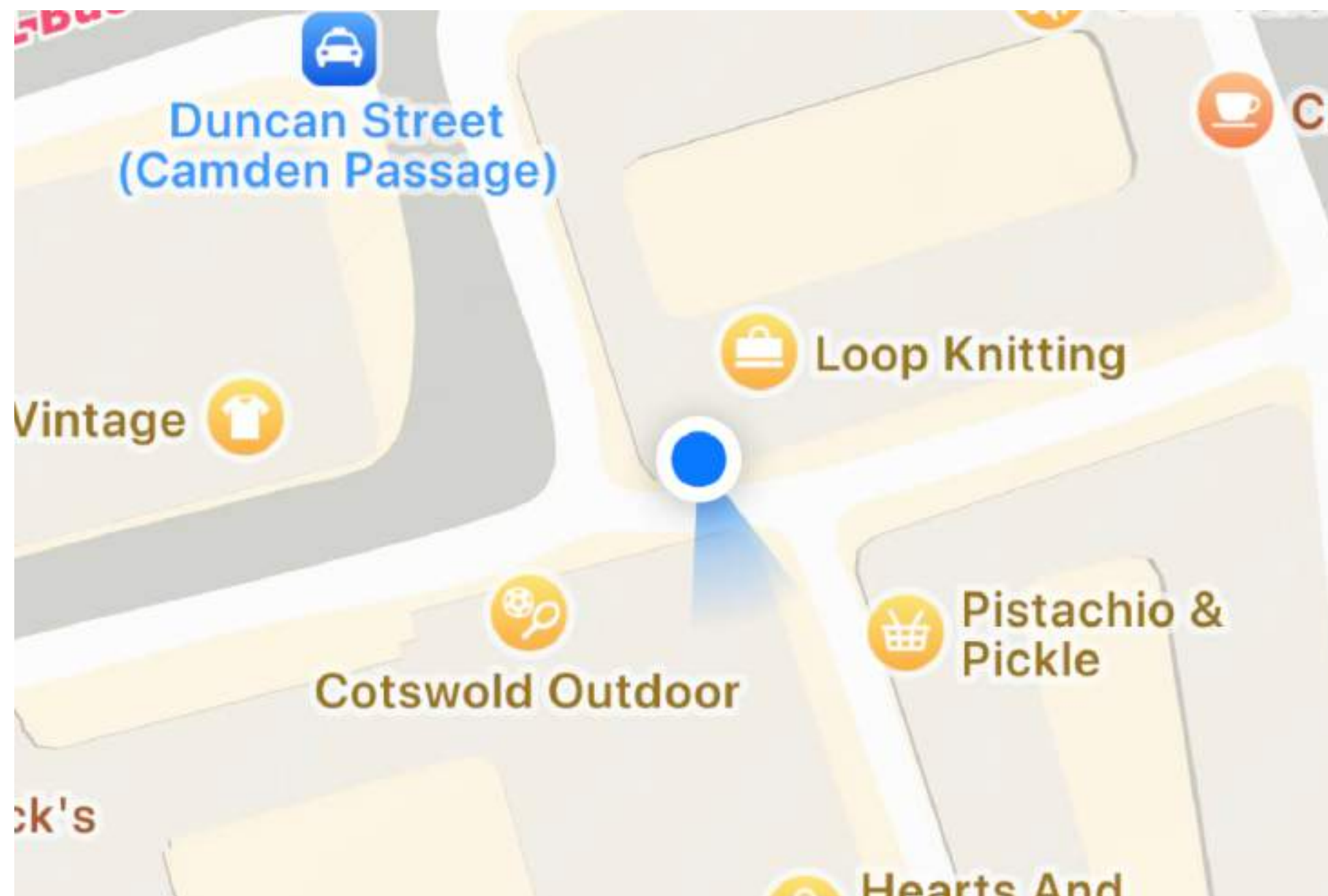


The second attempt, I decided to be slower and use cleaner lines to look at objects bit by bit and label them. I started to notice patterns and shapes, helping me to simplify the scene before me.

2 My next method was **notetaking through sketching**, but the first attempt felt a little anxious, trying to fit in all of the scene.

Experiments

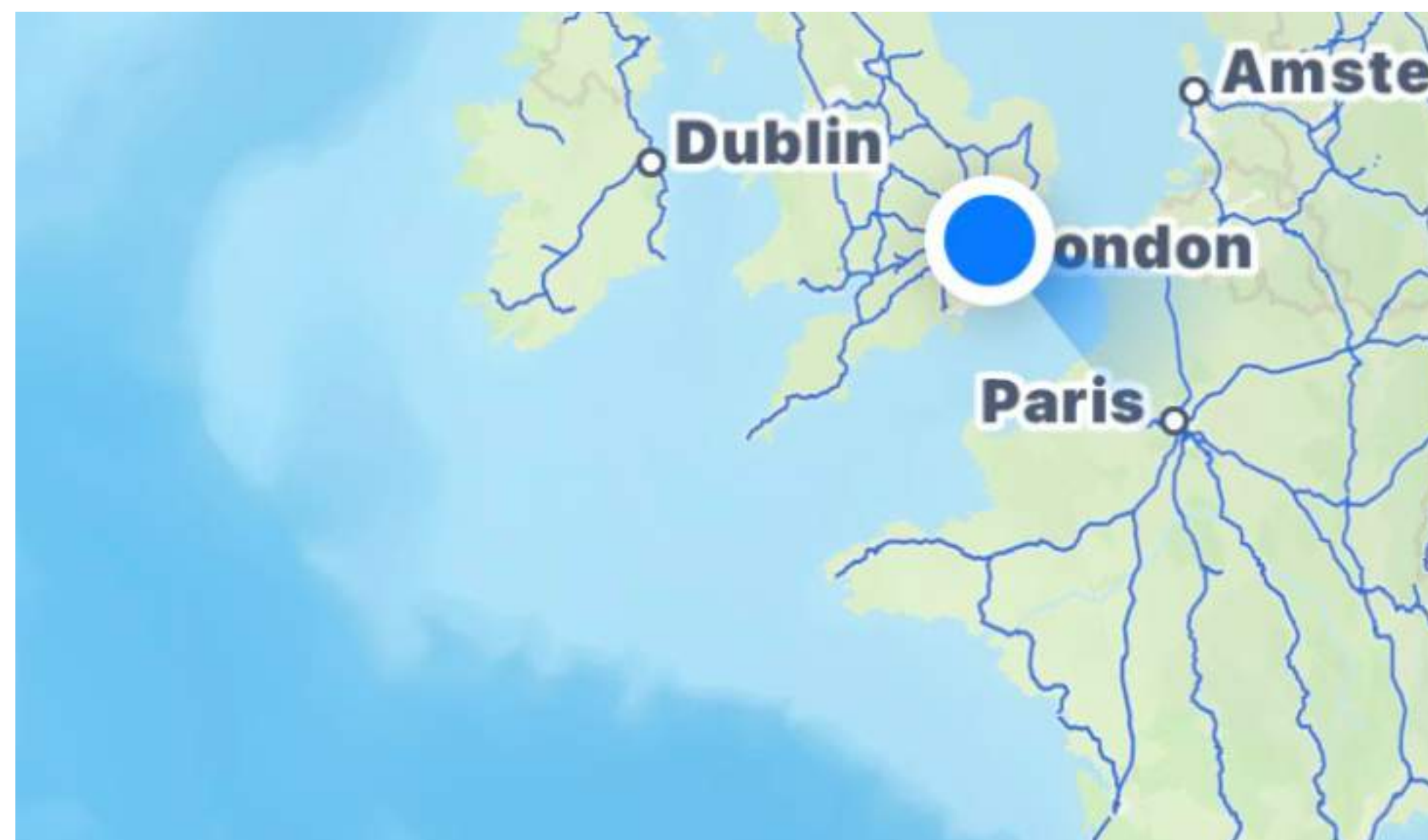
3 A final experiment involved looking at maps - to capture the essence of being in a new space, of **feeling removed even if you are present in the space**. It was to capture the alienation that I could tangibly feel on my skin, of being in a city “in another part of the world”, a thought that collided with my perception of space.



This approach was more personal, but a little outside the scope of the assignment and it would bend the idea of observation of a smaller space.

Up Next

I chose **sketching as notetaking (2)** as my favoured method of investigation.



Sketching as Investigation

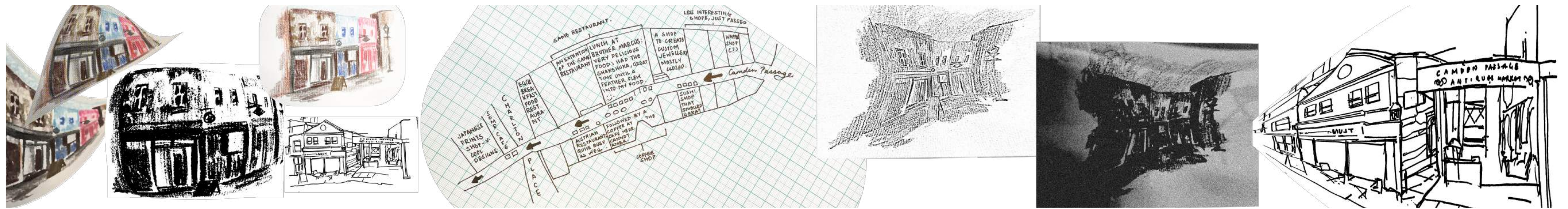
In the first drafts, I used sketching and collage as a form of **reportage illustration to create new landscapes of the area**. Wandering through the area during the quiet and peak hours, **deconstructing different elements that composed the space as a whole**, it observed of how **space was being used - who occupied it, for how long and why**.

For this iteration, I kept the sketches loose and fast to **capture moments and motion - and focussed on a part of the length of the lane instead of the antique store itself**.



I started to sketch the different objects that appeared before me, the different kinds of people and landmarks that created, one by one, the landscape.

Changing Form



To interpret the process of illustration as note-taking and getting carried away in it as an artform, I referenced the **Theory of Dérive** by Guy Debord (1956)

(Above) Distortion of the buildings to match different view points, from the side, from below, as they tower over me. Changing the joviality of the scene to a darker mood and more.

The *dérive* is closely linked to psychogeography, which studies how environments—streets, architecture, layouts—**affect human emotions and behavior. Instead of treating the city as a functional map, it is experienced emotionally and sensorially.**

I continued iterating on the landscape by then changing form of my sketches by distorting them, looking at from more than one angle, changing perspective, mapping out the emotional journey of passing through Camden Passage. I recombined these various elements to reconstruct the landscape.

*(Below) A collage bringing together the emotional, **temporal and visual trajectory of what one sees while passing through the area.***



A Look into Camden Passage

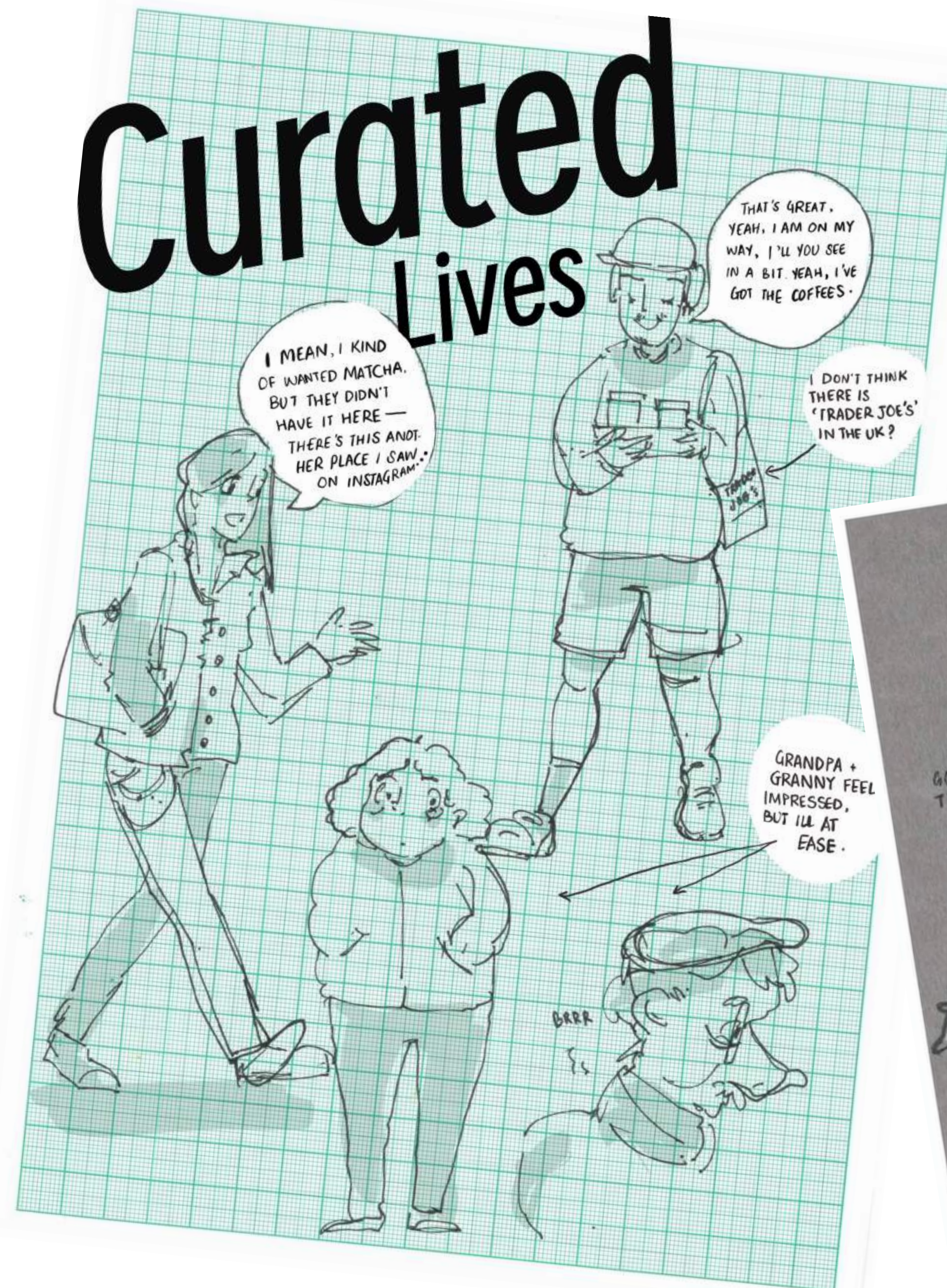


Built in the 1800s and revived in the 1960s as a notable market, Camden Passage now situates itself at the intersection of **digestible antiquity and curated modernity**.

To examine it, I used **layers of transparency to evoke the unchanging, aged edifices (buildings and cobblestone) against its modern, transient decorations** (new storefronts, seating and signage) and occupants to point out which parts of its legacy the space chooses to preserve.

(Above) The layers of transparency create a palimpsest of Camden Passage, of history mixed with aspirational modernity, with a high-value consumer base, and a working class that quietly sustains the lane in the background.

Watch flipthrough [here](#)



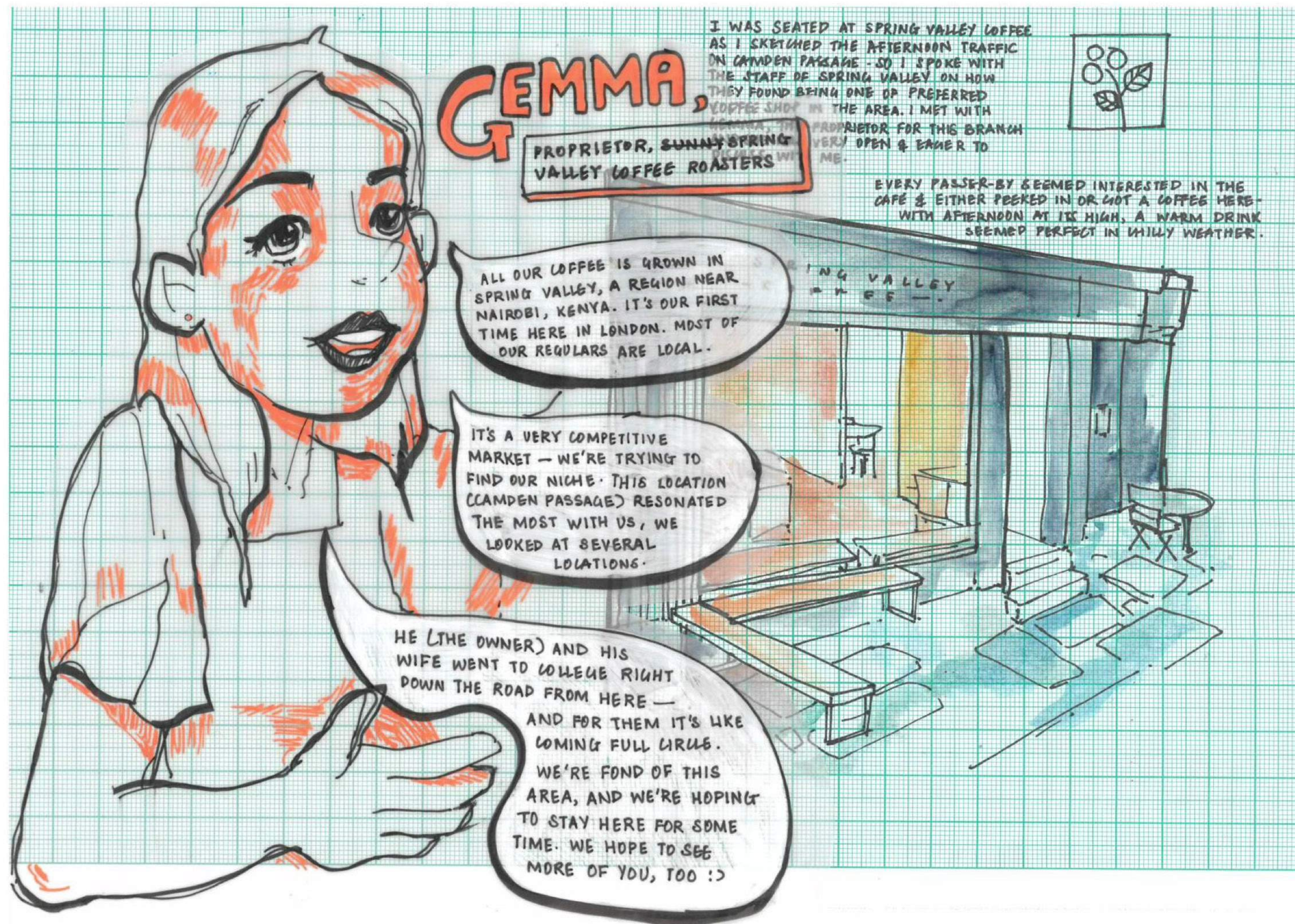
(Above) In my observations, I overheard moments and conversations where people interacted with the space. People came to take pictures for social media, to **have a coffee that can be a symbol of a restful day** instead of a hectic morning need a caffeine headstart. .

(Below) People were mostly well-dressed, with designer carry-ons. **The landscape worked for their appearance, and the appearance of the lane benefitted from a tasteful clientele.**



(Above) As afternoons drew in, the crowd turns creative, younger. The **image of wealth becomes subdued, and that of taste and aspiration rises.**

I focused on its inhabitants (customers, onlookers, stallholders), mapping visible and invisible semantics present in their belongings, personal effects and **conversations that drive a social and class divide by design.**



(Left) For this interaction, I was inspired by the journalistic illustrations of **Olivier Kugler**, who ethnographically and in-situ created new information through illustration art.

To conclude my set of illustrations, I wanted a peek into the life of an every-day commuter of Camden Passage, someone who is backstage, running the show. **Gemma, the kind proprietor of the cafe** from where I sat and sketched, offered some insight.

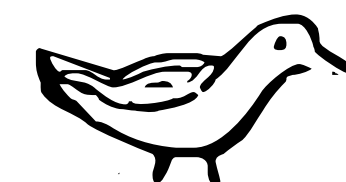
It was evident through her answers that Camden Passage **wasn't just a location for her business, but also the image of it.**

Reflection and Further Development

Reflection

Through this exercise, I was able to see Camden Passage allowing for both performance and refuge. Camden Passage offers an **anachronistic urban fantasy** - fueled by consumption and a bit of escapism.

Sketching it is tracing the line between authenticity and artifice, participation and critique. Illustration becomes **the spatial enquiry of how design, taste, ideology all intertwines in the walls and surface of city that is new to experience and perpetually imagined.**



Further Development

To further develop this project, I am interested in collecting these illustrations in a publication form that will **become a container for an illustrated journal of Camden Passage.**

Futhermore, I would like to **delve deeper into the anthropological detail of the project,** conduct more interviews to create an even fairer journalistic image of the locality.

