

Filia, Glasgow 2023

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As I pulled up to the cluster of modern day witches gathered under a badly lit railway arch, I felt somewhat bemused! I expected the hustle and bustle of boxes being carried in, a flutter of hasty hugs, the excited tension of another groundbreaking feminist gathering. I was quickly informed it may not happen as there was an issue with Platform staff not letting us in, the activists had almost had their way. Almost. After some quick thinking and legal discussions the brilliant Lisa-Marie, co-founder and CEO of [Filia](#) along with others from the team triumphed, and all was well.

I have to admit I almost didn't attend! After a fretful week with news of the war, my mental health was somewhat fragile and I wasn't sure how I might cope hearing the many heart-breaking and difficult topics such as domestic violence and femicide normally discussed at [Filia](#), but I'd made a pledge to myself - if you ever feel like it's too much it is OK to pop out and see the sights (I did visit the Botanical Gardens at one point! The perfect palate cleanser).

I was thrilled to discover that Metamorphosis100 was to be displayed in the main hall, and less thrilled to realise I had an incredibly painful shoulder and 50 portraits to hang, the irony of my achy joints being caused by the female-specific condition of perimenopause while at a conference on female-specific issues was not lost on me.

Portraits hanging on the wonderfully dramatic brick walls of the main arch.

And so, on the first day we trailed past a colourful welcoming committee on the opposite side of the road (I did a live video despite shaking with nerves! Alas it didn't post!) who were shouting even more colourful words at us. But this was all water off a hen's back to us. The only F words I wanted to focus on were the F-ing fabulous, feisty, female feminists!

As I entered hoping to spot a familiar face, I was delighted to receive a warm hug from Maya Forstater from [Sex Matters](#), who promptly popped a sign in my hand commenting on how I randomly matched (a total coincidence!)

One session I attended was '[Joanna Cherry](#) in Conversation with [Reem Alsalem](#)', I've never heard of a UN Special Rapporteur and it was fascinating to hear what it entails and especially shocking and saddening to know some countries stopped Reem at the airport to prevent her entering the country to find out the truth about violence against women and girls! I also loved the session on Campaigning and Media Training from [Freya](#), Paola Buonadonna, Sasha Rozansky, Helen Nicholls - the focus

on long and short term goals with my art series really got my brain cells turning. For me one of the highlights of the weekend was connecting with others, making new friends and deepening friendships that already exist (and seeing people you've bonded with behind Twitter/X profiles is always surreal and thrilling). Two of the best moments were spending an evening with a fabulous comedienne discussing free speech, censorship and the tricky tasks of elevating women in comedy and a deep discussion with a lesbian couple, one of whom did not realise that some bisexual/straight women could also feel like outsiders their whole lives. I also had the pleasure of spending time with Björn and his brilliant band of male allies from the MACS conference (menchallengingsexism.org.uk) where I was lucky enough to meet Rudy. Björn and I discussed in depth the ultimate conundrum - how to engage with straight men about sexism (ideas on a postcard please!)

And look who I met at the Filia party!

It was fantastic to see Victoria, you might recognise her from my latest portrait, you can read her story [here](#) and we had an excellent chat about sexuality, creativity and being women who dare to be different!

And the star attraction

Of course no report on Filia 2023 can go without mentioning a certain someone who made a surprise appearance! There were some hushed whispers that JK Rowling might be turning up but nobody knew when. And so it was, I was in a completely different room when I heard a riotous cheer erupt from the main arch! I managed to sneak this photo but still felt frustrated not to be seated in the same room. I'm pleased to say she mentioned detransitioners repeatedly and although she did not gesture towards my art - I'm thrilled (and hopeful) that she might have noticed the pieces to the right of where she was seated. It was delightful to hear her speak, how measured and amusing she can be in person and heartfelt and compassionate about issues that affect everyone, men, women and trans-identifying people alike (my words).

How tired do I look here!

Each Filia is different. This venue had it's challenges, I didn't love the fact we couldn't all be in the same room at the same time! At Cardiff it was mighty powerful to feel the strength in numbers. Seeing no daylight, and feeling 'underground' also added to the intensity and sense that we were all doing something illicit, when we are simply women speaking up about women's issues. I find attending Filia difficult, I feel like an outlier surrounded by outspoken, confident older lesbians who've been fighting for women's rights for decades. Notably I was (yet again) the only one with blue hair. This year there was little mention of 'gender identity' or detransition. I do sense my art series is part of a venn diagram, with women's rights on one side and gender ideology on the other. Every woman in my series has been affected by how women are treated by society - whether through sexualisation, trauma, homophobia or misogyny. It was interesting to compare Filia to the [Genspect](#) conference I attended in Killarney earlier this year (several women from my series were there) and the difference between the more sociological focus at Filia versus the psychological at Genspect (more on that another time!)

The best part of attending was hearing from others about the powerful impact the portraits and stories in my series had. Seeing all these strong faces staring at you from the wall, makes you think 'that could have been me' and we have to do better for women today. I am finding it a challenge to keep going but Filia highlighted the

importance of my mission and motivated me to continue to make a difference for awkward women and especially detransitioners everywhere.

