Kulturreportage

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"She should be as she was in life, unmissable."

On Tuesday October 23 the portrait of the murdered journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia was unveiled in the European Parliament in Strasbourg. Malmö artist Marie Louise Kold has spent 470 unpaid hours creating the copper portrait.

In the afternoon of October 16, 2017, a powerful explosion was heard in the small village of Bidnija in Malta. Matthew Caruana Galizia left the house barefoot and ran to the burning car that had been thrown off the road and into a field. The car was completely demolished. Through the blown out windows he couldn't see the slightest trace of a human being. He just saw fire.

Only half an hour earlier, his mother, Daphne Caruana Galizia, Malta's most resolute investigative journalist, had posted on her popular blog. This ended with the words: "There are crooks everywhere you look now. The situation is desperate."

She had gotten into her car to drive to the bank. Recently, one of her critical investigations had led to libel charges, and her assets had been frozen leading up the trial. That was what she was going to tackle when she got into her Peugeot 108.

Shortly after Daphne Caruana Galizia had rolled onto the road, a bomb placed under the driver's seat was detonated from afar.

Her son Matthew stood there in front of the burning car wreck in the field and suddenly he saw his mother.

She lay scattered around him.

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The journalist's face appears in black relief against the shiny copper. The etched lines have been filled in with printer's ink purchased from one of the printing presses in Malta that used to print her words. Marie Louise Kold has based the portrait on a photo that she knew that Daphne Caruana Galizia liked, she had used it on her blog.

We are meeting at the end of August and the portrait of the investigative journalist is almost ready.

The studio in Västra Sorgenfri in Malmö is filled with metal. Among other things, parts of a more than hundred years old patinated copper roof.

Marie Louise Kold fell in love with copper when she attended Lund's Art School just over 20 years ago, but she sounds as if she's only just fallen in love with it when she speaks about the material.

"The copper plate was only supposed to be used to make prints on paper. But it changed. It was alive! It told a story that could never be transmitted into a print. And then I realized: it's the metal itself I'm going to work with."

On October 23 Marie Louise Kold was in Strasbourg along with Daphne Caruana Galizia's family to hand over her work to the European Parliament.

It now hangs immediately outside the Press Conference Centre, named after the journalist. The copper portrait has been placed on a wooden frame that looks a bit like a book spine. One side of it is adorned with details made of etched and patinated copper, brass and bronze: excerpts from Article 11 of the EU Charter on freedom of expression and information of the press, Daphne Caruana Galizia's last, ominous word and leaves from her garden that have been imprinted on a bronze plate.

The artwork is placed at eye level so that the EU journalists will meet their murdered colleague's eyes when they go in to do their jobs.

"I felt this should be something that you cannot miss. She should be as she was in life, unmissable," says Marie Louise Kold.

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The Malmö based metal artist is married to a Maltese man and lives on the small island a few months a year. She basically followed Daphne Caruana Galizia's blog on a daily basis.

Marie Louise Kold was at home in Malmö when she read in the Maltese media about a car explosion in Bidnija. Every time she heard of the little village, she thought of Daphne Caruana Galizia. The journalist had been given the nickname "The Witch from Bidnija" by people who didn't like her.

Marie Louise Kold knew how hated Daphne Caruana Galizia was. She knew that three of her dogs had been killed on different occasions, and that her home had been vandalized.

Nevertheless, she found it hard to accept the name of the controversial journalist in the same sentence as the word "murdered".

She thought the car bomb was some kind of payback within the criminal world. The assassination of a journalist in Malta was unthinkable.

"Half an hour later, a friend wrote on Facebook: "OMG". That was all. And that was enough for me to understand."

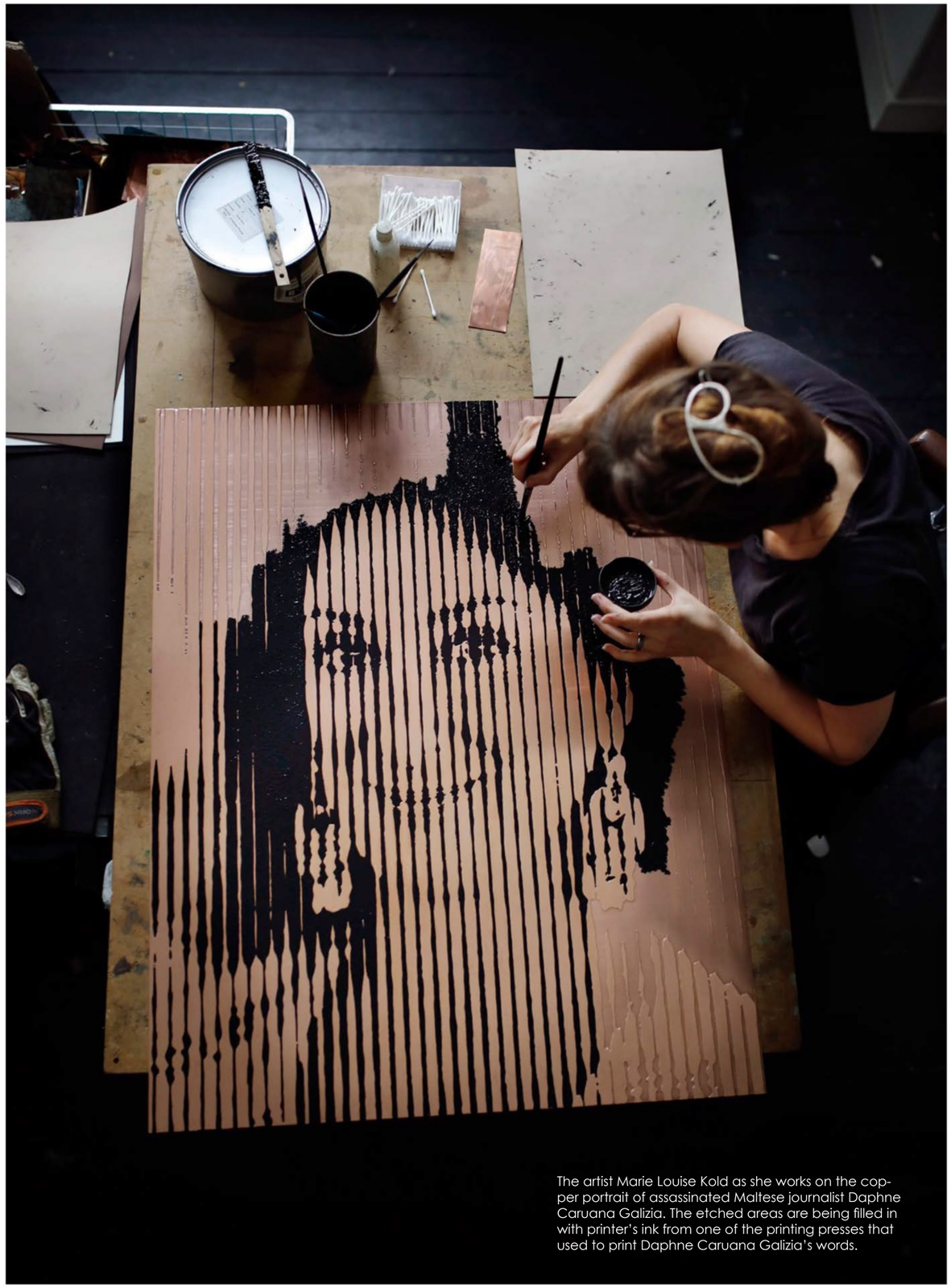
She felt she had to do something.

It took 15 minutes for the President of the European Parliament, Antonio Tajani to say yes to the portrait. And after all bureaucratic obstacles were eliminated with the help of Maltese official, Peter Agius, she could start the creative process. The work is the result of 470 hours of unpaid work.

"I make a living off my art and get paid well for what I do. So I felt I could afford it. This means so much to me. I'm not helping solve the murder of course. But I want to put a spotlight on her. She cannot just be buried and forgotten."

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Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for journalists to be killed around the world, but this had happened in an EU country. And after Daphne Caruana Galizia, two other journalists have been murdered within the Union. The investigative Slovak journalist Ján Kuciak and his girlfriend were shot dead in February this year. On October 6, the Bulgarian journalist Viktoria Marinova was found raped and killed in a park. One week before the murder, in a live broadcast she had interviewed two colleagues who had revealed corruption with links to political power.



The artist Marie Louise Kold as she works on the copper portrait of assassinated Maltese journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia. The etched areas are being filled in with printer's ink from one of the printing presses that used to print Daphne Caruana Galizia's words.

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Marie Louise Kold, born in Århus in Denmark in 1974, is a metal artist based in Malmö. A few months a year she lives in Malta, where her husband is from. Marie Louise Kold's portrait will hang by the entrance to the Press Conference Room in the European Parliament in Strasbourg. Kold has, among other things, incorporated plants from Daphne Caruana Galizia's garden, and her last message written barely half an hour before her murder: "There are crooks everywhere you look now. The situation is desperate."

Although none of the murders has been completely cleared up, they are examples of a worrying tendency.

Jonathan Lundqvist, Chairman of Reporters Without Borders in Sweden, says that his organization is pushing for press freedom and protection of journalists to be included in the assessment when the EU looks at new potential member states.

Slovakia is actually in a decent 27th place in Reporters Without Borders' Press Freedom Index. Bulgaria is ranked at 111 and is by far the worst in the EU. In recent years Malta has plummeted to 65th place.

Jonathan Lundqvist points out that a country is fundamentally changed when it becomes a member of the EU.

"The EU has quite extensive economic redistribution systems. Suddenly, a lot of money comes into a society, and politicians need to distribute these large amounts. The control mechanisms are not always very good. And could lead to increased corruption."

The small island nation of Malta, which covers about the same area as Örkelljunga municipality, is a famous home to shell companies and gaming companies, and corruption is widespread.

"Malta is quite a unique EU country, not least because of its smallness. This smallness has consequences. There is a blend of the political, financial and media spheres. These different power centers are not as separate as they are in larger countries", said Jonathan Lundqvist.

The list of Daphne Caruana Galizia's enemies is a long one. She wrote about fuel smugglers, swindling businessmen and corrupt politicians.

For many years she worked as a columnist for various Maltese newspapers before starting her own blog, Running Commentary, in English in 2008. It mixed investigative journalism with comments and opinions. She was called a "one-woman Wikileaks" and often had more readers than all other Maltese media put together.

Caruana Galizia also edited and produced the glossy lifestyle magazine Taste & Flair, and would not hold back from criticising a politician's wife lacking a sense of style. She could, to some, come across a snob and a bit of a bully, says Marie Louise Kold.

"She was known by all, hated by many. She was controversial and did not care about being liked. She delivered truths."

On a couple of occasions Marie Louise Kold sent illustrations to Daphne Caruana Galizia, which she also used. But she did not know her personally. They met once. Stephen Sackur from the BBC's "Hardtalk" was in Malta and gave a talk about freedom of speech.

"My husband and I walked with Daphne through Valletta afterwards. She was very quiet and observant, she mostly listened. And that's not how she came across in writing. In writing she was sharp and outspoken.

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In Malta there are two parties fighting for political power: the Nationalist Party and the Labour Party. Daphne Caruana Galizia was ruthless towards corruption from all directions, but her sympathies lay with the Nationalist Party. Her arsenal was directed at the Labour Party, especially after 2013 when the party came to power after a long time in opposition.

With the help of her son Matthew, a journalist who was part of the network that delved into the Panama documents, she came across papers that appeared to show that Prime Minister Joseph Muscat's wife had a dubious company in Panama. But Daphne Caruana Galizia never published the document in question, and the prime minister dismissed everything as lies. The opposition, however, used this to fight the government and eventually Muscat was forced to announce an early elections. His party won and remained in power.

At the beginning of 2017 she claimed, based on an anonymous source, that Economy Minister Christian Cardona had visited a brothel during an official visit to Germany. The minister sued Daphne Caruana Galizia for libel, and his lawyers got the court to freeze her assets as they waited for the trial. And this is what she was going to try to solve when she was silenced for good.

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Three people have been arrested, suspected of carrying out the murder. A trio of criminals around 50 years old who so far have said nothing.

Daphne Caruana Galizia had never written about the three, and even if they were to be convicted – the technical evidence is considered to be strong – the question remains as to who ordered the murder.

The government of Malta has been pressured by the EU to do everything in its power to find all those involved in the murder. "Europe's eyes are on the Maltese authorities", said European Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans in a statement shortly after the murder. That says quite a lot about the union's confidence in the rule of law of its smallest member state.

The murdered journalist's son, Matthew – who, together with his two brothers, has been forced to flee the island – has on Facebook indirectly accused Malta's government of the murder: "If the authorities worked as they should, there would have been no murder to investigate – and I and my brothers would still have a mother."

The day before the anniversary of Daphne Caruana Galizia's death, Reporters Without Borders, PEN and three other press freedom organizations met Malta's Prime Minister Joseph Muscat. During the meeting they made several demands, including a public inquiry into whether the murder could have been prevented.

The organizations also called for a halt to the harassment that has continued after Daphne Caruana Galizia's death, and called on the Prime Minister to fire Jason Micallef, chairman of Valletta 2018, the cultural capital project (Valletta is one of the EU's cultural capital cities 2018). During the St Patrick's Day celebrations last spring, he mocked on social media the last words of the murdered journalist: "The situation is desperate. There are happy people everywhere you look."

Earlier this year, Tony Zarb, a former trade union boss who is close to the Labor Government, said: "The most important thing is that Daphne Caruana Galizia will never come back."

When Daphne Caruana Galizia died, she had 42 pending libel cases filed against her. Thirty of them are still being pursued after her death.

Jonathan Lundqvist says that Daphne Caruana Galizia was one of the journalists that Reporters Without Borders was keeping a careful eye on.

"We had received indications that she was working under quite difficult circumstances. That she received threats and that she was subject to legal attacks. When we look at potential risks for journalists, it is exactly what she was subjected to that we usually warn about. Defamation laws are a necessity in civilized society. But it becomes problematic when you start to abuse them."

Reporters Without Borders drew attention to her situation in a press release. In hindsight, Jonathan Lundqvist is partly self-critical.

"Knowing what we now know, we could of course have drawn more attention to it. But it is hard to know which of these cases will lead to the ultimate consequence."

After the murder the organization has intensified its work to improve the conditions for investigative journalists.

When a journalist has his investigative work and wants comments from the accused, there is a period of time before publication where things can get dangerous. Reporters Without Borders have now started building a support system so that journalists can deposit their material with the organization or a partner, in anticipation of publication.

"We hope that potential perpetrators will know that it is completely meaningless to kill a journalist, because the material will still live on," says Jonathan Lundqvist.

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Marie Louise Kold is very fond of her second home country, in which she has lived three to four months a year for the past seven years. She describes it as a "big country that has been shrunk". Everything is there, she says. A national museum. An opera. Beautiful, varied nature. And many creative people.

"I have had several fantastic exhibition experiences in Malta. I have been welcomed with open arms by the artists, and feel more like part of the artistic community there than I do here in Sweden", she says.

But the murder of Daphne Caruana Galizia has made her look at Malta with different eyes.

The initial shock that it happened in Malta soon faded.

"After a while I started to see the social climate that led to this. And then it did not feel so unthinkable anymore."

It is clear that Marie Louise Kold has been strongly affected by the murder, and she is very familiar with the case – while we are in contact, she sends me links and comments on several occasions.

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Near the Valletta court building people have lit candles and left flowers. A memorial that has been erected and demolished more than twenty times in an ongoing struggle for the murdered journalist's legacy.

A network consisting of eighteen heavy duty media – including The Guardian, Le Monde and The New York Times – was formed to carry on Daphne Caruana Galizia's investigations. In Malta, new blogs and news sites are trying to fill the void she left behind.

But there are also a lot of people who just want to forget and move on, says Marie Louise Kold. "Many in Malta think that there's a damned lot of harping on about her. Can't we just look forward, the economy is doing so well! But to me this is so extreme. That a journalist is assassinated. That sound continues to echo in me, it does not fade, it does not cease."

"After a while I started to see the social climate that led to this. And then it did not feel so unthinkable anymore."

Marie Louise Kold.

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DAPHNE CARUANA GALIZIA

■ **Daphne Caruana Galizia,**

Daphne Caruana Galizia, born in 1964, was Malta's most famous journalist. She wrote about money laundering, fuel smuggling and corrupt politicians, among other things. She started her blog Running Commentary in 2008, where she mixed investigative journalism with topical comments. In October last year she was killed by a car bomb.

After her death she has received many posthumous awards. This spring she was awarded the Anna Politkovskaja Award by Publicistklubben (the National Press Club). Earlier this week she was given this year's anti-corruption award by Transparency International.



FOTO: RENÉ ROSSIGNAUD/AP/TT

On October 16 2017 a bomb was detonated in Daphne Caruana Galizia's car. She was murdered near her home in the village of Bidnija.



FOTO: JONATHAN BORG/AP/TT

Demonstration in Valletta on the anniversary of her murder