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## 29 DAYS AT SEA – THE FLOATING ARTIST’S STUDIO

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6 MINUTES READING TIME

“ I LOVED IT WHEN THE CAPTAIN SAW THE FIRST *CARDIOGRAMS* AND STARTED TO GUESS THE FORCE OF THE WIND THAT DAY. HE COULD READ THEM, AND HE RECOGNISED THIS WORK AS A GOOD TOOL OF MEMORISING THE LIFE OF THE SHIP ”

*Artist Lulu Nuti tells us about when she climbed aboard a tanker in Tubarao, Brazil and set sail for the Netherlands*

“To be truthful my first impression was ‘I don’t want to go up!’ because I have vertigo and the only way onto the ship was via a tiny staircase,” says French artist Lulu Nuti. “Once I was onboard the *Cielo d’Italia* I was struck by the size of this enormous iron labyrinth. At first I thought I would never get used to it and would always get lost. Now I’m back on dry land I miss it and every day I try to imagine where she is,” says Nuti.

In April 2017, Nuti was invited to be the artist in residence on the *Cielo d’Italia*. She was one of the first artists to join The Owner’s Cabin (<http://www.theownerscabin.com/>) programme, which would see contemporary artists set sail upon one of the d’Amico vessels and journey across the high seas.

Nuti had taken part in residencies earlier in her career in France, Japan and Italy. “When The Owner’s Cabin team invited me to participate, my reaction was curiosity, excitement and fear at the same time,” she says.

It’s understandable why Nuti was hesitant as Alice Russotti who helps oversee The Owner’s Cabin programme says that a trip on a container ship can trigger all your emotions. “You’re in this bubble moving constantly on the water, through time and space. Emotionally it’s quite interesting. In the beginning it’s exciting, second or third day it’s boring and then it’s scary, then you step into a moment of calm for the remaining amount of time.”



(<http://www.lightfoottravel.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Cardiogram-work-in-progress-bidge-cielo-dItalia.jpg?0a9421>)

The ship filled with iron ore took Nuti from Tubarao in Brazil to Rotterdam in the Netherlands. And it was the owner's cabin, with a view of the ocean, which acted as her home and studio for the next 29 days.

She says that there were two particular changes that she had to get used to – one was the fact that her studio was always swaying and the other that she couldn't go to the store to get extra materials. "You can't go buy tools or materials so if you have an unexpected idea you have to imagine ways to do it with the possibility you have in that moment," says Nuti. The artist saw this less as an obstacle and more of an opportunity – a way for her to be more creative in her work. "It didn't create any limitations, on the contrary, it opened new ideas and unexpected approaches. The only limit that I had was I couldn't make any errors because I had a limited amount of materials. Every thrum's wire was precious as gold for me."

When Nuti set sail her aim was to draw the journey of the vessel. "I kept this concept, but I produced it in a different way from what I was supposed to do. For example, I created cardiograms, which were not in my original plans. I decided to do this because everything in my cabin was swinging and I wanted to give a form to this movement. I also realised that the ship is an organic living object. The sailors say that the bridge is the brain of the ship, and the engine its heart..." She also took plaster casts of the ship, which were dried by the wind. "When the watcher arrives at my exhibition, he or she can't feel the force of the wind on their body, but I hope he has this sensation of precarity I felt when I came out from my cabin for the first time, while we were in open sea."



(<http://www.lightfoottravel.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/plaster-2.jpg?0a9421>)

A real landlubber, Nuti still managed to cope with the turbulent seas, never once having sea sickness during her whole journey. And the solitude didn't affect her either. "People would say 'How do you handle being alone in the middle of the ocean without internet?' But I feel more lonely walking in the city with thousands of people around me. This residency makes you live in the

present. To ride it, to go deep in it."

While the crew was bemused by the artist hitching a ride in their vessel, they were intrigued by what she was creating.

"At the beginning the sailors didn't understand why I was there and what I was doing. Sometimes, I would see someone pass by my cabin and give a puzzled look at the pen suspended in my cabin registering the movements of the ship. Soon they started to help me and ask questions and offer advice.

"I loved it when the Captain saw the first *Cardiograms* and started to guess the force of the wind that day. He could read them, and he recognised this work as a good sensitive tool of memorising the life of the ship. I'm very proud of it."

It wasn't long before the sailors became part of Nuti's works. "Before I climbed aboard the sea, my plans focused on the natural elements and I never thought about the sailors. I started to interview to the crew and film them while working. I also captured their footprints. The dust of the iron ore that the ship was carrying was deposited on the floor and made the sailors' footsteps visible. I decided to fix it in plaster sheets."

But while Nuti introduced her to the world of art, the sailors introduced her to life on the waves. "I have two days from my journey which I can't forget: One is when we passed the equator on the 10 May. The sailors have an ancient belief that if there is a sailor on the ship that passes equator for the first time it means good luck for him and for the vessel. They mark this with a ritual which sailors have been doing for centuries, and on this day Captain Mele and the crew decided to hold a mini celebration for me. I had the honour to enter in the sailor's family, to be part of them."

The second special day for Nuti came nine days later when they sailed into the Celtic Sea. "More than one hundred whales came out from the water and surrounded the ship," she says.



(<http://www.lightfoottravel.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/LNUTI-with-work.jpg?0a9421>)

Nuti was at sea for most of the journey. The ship only stopped once at Salvador where they stayed for more than a week. "I couldn't leave the boat, but I was treated to the behind-the-scenes view of port life, little boats coming near the vessel to trying to sell them cigarettes and ships coming in and out to discharge their containers... I had also had appointment with dolphins every day at sunset."

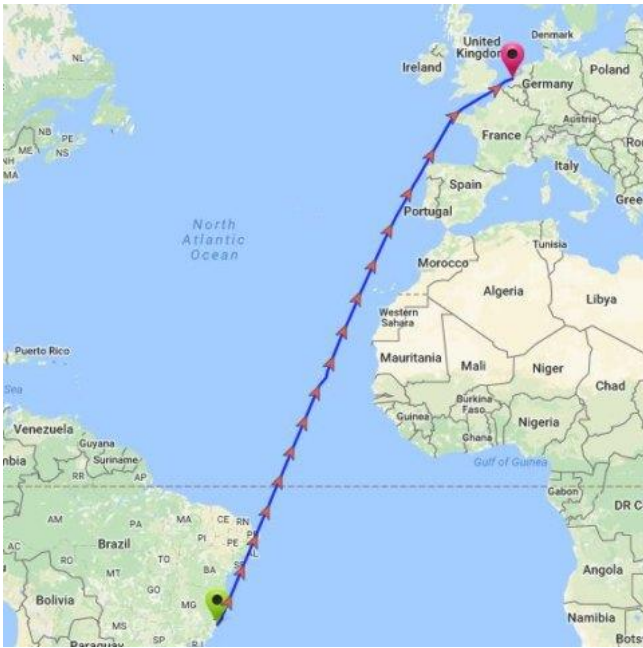
Even with all of these distractions, Nuti was prolific. "I was always working, some nights I didn't want to sleep because I was afraid to miss some event in the sea. You have to work when you can as you can't totally predict the weather and I had also to adapt my work to the needs and timing of the crew," she explains.

As Nuti's journey drew to an end she says that she didn't want to go ashore and wanted to stay on the ship. "At the end of the journey, more ships started appearing and the light slowly started to change. The arrival was long and painful for me. I joke that I had no cabin fever, instead I had ground sickness the first two days on land!"

Nuti's tips for anyone who would like to take the same journey: "Don't try to plan anything, never resist to events – just embrace the adventure."

*Nuti will be showing her *Cardiograms* series at the Alessandra Bonomo gallery in Rome, and in 2018 she will show her *Breaking Point* sculptures at a solo show at Galerie Mansart in Paris.*





(<http://www.lightfoottravel.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/lulus-voyage.jpg?0a9421>)

### The Story Behind The Cabin

Art curator Alice Russotti tells us how the Owner’s Cabin was launched

“In 2014, my husband Peter who works for the shipping company d’Amico was chatting to the French photographer Noemie Goudal about a journey that we took on a container ship seven or eight years ago from Dubai to Hong Kong. My husband at that time was about to do his masters in shipping, trading and finance and he wanted to know what the experience would be like on board. As Noemie is a photographer who looks between nature and artifice, she was keen to visit the ship and take some photographs.

When Noemie took photos of the ship there wasn’t a journey involved. It was just an artist getting on board and appreciating this crazy environment. That was the impetus for us to think perhaps that we should do something more long term.

We thought that by bringing artists on board it would be a great way of making the invisible visible. It’s in such isolation, but at the centre of global trade and commerce. We have had three artists take part in the programme so far and three more will join next year. So that we can continue to make the invisible visible ask each artist to donate a piece of their work to the programme, as once we’ve had a critical mass we would like to do an exhibition and showcase how these artists have approached the residency.”

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