

D'Amico's 'Owner's Cabin' art project lifts lid on life at sea

Andy Pierce **London**

As Italian artist Benedetto Pietromarchi drove to the port of Punta Pereira in Uruguay, he was heading into the unknown.

He was set to board the 36,699-dwt bulker *Cielo di Vaiano* (built 2011) for a month's residency afloat in the Atlantic as the first artist on d'Amico Group's "Owner's Cabin" programme.

Pietromarchi felt as though he was jumping into a void. "It was very exciting and daunting at the same time," the Berlin-based artist explained.

While the lure of being disconnected from the bustle of modern life and communications had attracted Pietromarchi to the

project, his first night on the ship was far from serene.

"The cargo was being lifted onto the vessel, so the crew and all of the area around it was in full operational mode, cranes shifting tonnes of wood pulp into the vast empty spaces of the ship, trucks going everywhere, people shifting turns. It went on all night, I couldn't sleep," he said. "But as the belly of the *Cielo di Vaiano* got filled and the journey commenced, Captain Diodoro and the crew helped me to feel at home."

Once at sea, Pietromarchi got to work. The setting onboard "a giant metal whale with only 19 people" left

him with nothing familiar to relate to except the ocean.

"The sea has always inspired me in many different ways," he said. "In this particular situation it has given me the comfort and the concentration to focus on the project. The feeling of endless landscape, vast depths and open skies all relate to infinity, a great place to focus on."

Since setting sail on 6 July, Pietromarchi has been sculpting, filming, drawing and taking photographs onboard. One of his personal challenges had been to make clay busts of crew members, each in just one hour. "As they started to pose I quickly found myself making them within a half-hour," he said. "I see them as 3D snapshots. I follow each one after to finish the details and to make them ready for firing once dried."

SHIFTING CLOUD FORMATIONS

At noon every day he has taken a photo from the bridge wing, focusing on the clouds, through which he intends to tell the story of the voyage.

His afternoons have been occupied filming, seeking out hidden corners of the vessel and talking to the crew about their lives and experiences.

Working at sea has obviously presented some specific challenges due to the constant rolling of the ship. "One particular funny instant was when, at a high rolling point, the [clay] heads, still fresh, started nodding sideways and seemed to come to life," Pietromarchi recalled. "Amusing to start with but very impractical for the



► **TEMPORARY RESIDENT:** Benedetto Pietromarchi on deck outside the bridge of the bulker *Cielo di Vaiano*.

Photos: D'AMICO GROUP



► **PLYING THE OCEANS:** Benedetto Pietromarchi getting to know crew members, their lives and experiences.

stability of the clay. The next day they were cracked open."

The Paolo d'Amico-led owner hopes Pietromarchi will be the first of many artists to tap into the programme, which started after a photographer, Noemie Goudal, was invited onboard a ship and ended up producing a short film.

"The entire experience was a success and her work really captured the raw beauty of our vessels," explained Peter Russotti of d'Amico. "One of our chartering managers in London thought about making this a more permanent, proper residency programme, where several artists per

year, from all different mediums, could sail on board and create work inspired by this incredible industry in which we work."

"We hope to provide artists with an experience that will inspire them. Over time, through this work created onboard we will seek to engage with the broader public, creating a heightened interest in and awareness of shipping and trade, as well as the varied and fascinating ideas and realities that surround this industry — from the purely aesthetic to negotiating with more conceptual notions of time and space, to issues of a more social, political and economic nature."



► **THE ARTIST AT WORK:** Benedetto Pietromarchi creates a clay bust of a crew member.

