

The Maritime Museum and Cidia – the fishing lugger

Hello Cidia,

I like to cross the threshold of the museum and find myself in front of your red eyes, magical and alive, always ready to scrutinize the horizon. In the middle we see your keel, our children call it your "nose", and it took you to the high seas, solid and proud.

I touch you, Cidia. I always like to feel your wood, old and wrinkled, but smooth to the touch. Smoothed by the water and the salt.

I like to pass my fingers between the cracks of the planks and think about the ship's boy whose job it was to fill them with pitch. It was known, in mariner jargon, as "doing the caulking".

I like to touch the head of the cold nails in your wood, it's always a reminder of how strong you are.

I like to feel the weight of your fenders, which protect you when you dock in port or pull alongside another boat. They are rough but nice to the touch, the hemp tickles your fingers.

I like to look at you from the base of your hull up: your imposing mast almost seems to pierce the ceiling, and I realize that this space was built, made to measure, just for you.

I look at the colourful sails that have withstood the wind, each tear carefully repaired.

Then there are the ropes, indispensable for sailing, stretched or rolled up everywhere.

You're a hundred years old now, but I like to imagine you still crossing the waves. Who knows how many sailors you led offshore and brought back home, how many slept in your hold, how many hoisted the sails and manoeuvred the rudder?

I was at sea: not with you, but with another vintage boat. And you know what? I was afraid because the hull was almost totally submerged, the water comes to within 20 to 30 centimetres from the edge and there is always that smell of stagnant salt water. You can almost hear the call to the ship's boy to sweep the deck quickly, if not there is a risk of slipping.

Returning now to the museum, I realize that I have lost your scent, a forgotten smell, which whilst no longer recognisable, I am quite sure it continues to penetrate your wood and is imprinted on your planks.

Now I want to watch you from above, so I climb the first flight of stairs.

I imagine you on a stormy day. I see the sailors who give one, two or even three hands to reef the sails, lacing up to reduce their surface area. Today there is a strong wind: if you were at sea you would have to wind your sails in. You would hear the crunch of the hoists, the friction of the ropes.

I climb the last flight of stairs and overlook the terrace. [pause to allow the listener to go up]

I look at you for a moment in silence: from here I can finally see the deck, slightly curved and where the life of the sailors took place alongside each other!

At the stern I admire one of your "zoie", the jewels, the decorative plaque with your launch date. I see the "bittone", the wooden column placed at the foot of the mast, firm, and indispensable to help secure the ropes.

Finally, I see the hatch, the trapdoor that leads to your heart, where all that hidden life took place, which we can only imagine from the stories of those who lived there: the fish, the provisions, the nets, the sailors' beds ...

All secret but equally an important part of your navigation. Maybe that's exactly where your perfume is stored.

Rossella Mancinelli

Bookseller