

# Victor Boullet: Brooding Parasite Feeding Week

[Institute of Social Hypocrisy](#), Paris

1–8 November

**By Chris Sharp**

When Norwegian artist Victor Boullet invited French curator Damien Airault to undertake a project at the artist's Institute of Social Hypocrisy, a second-floor project space in the Marais, Airault, as the novelistic cliché goes, didn't quite know what he was getting himself into'. Indeed, rather than exercising anything like creative agency – through, say, the organisation of an exhibition – the curator was requested to abdicate it entirely, along with his physical liberty.



For the space of exactly one week, from Monday 1 November at midday until the same hour on the following Monday, the curator was willingly (I quote) “incarcerated” inside the Institute. Like any good jailer, Boullet assumed full responsibility for the curator's nourishment, feeding him twice a day, precisely at midday and 6pm – and here's the twist – a meal invariably based on whale meat. (This is contraband in France; Boullet had to smuggle it into his adopted home country at his own risk.) However, lest the monotony of the exotic

victual become too punishing, Boullet was sure to carefully and imaginatively prepare it differently each time, creating something of a gourmet menu that ranged from ‘whale steak with wild fennel seeds and Tasmanian bush pepper with red-pepper sauce’ to ‘whale risotto



with Valpolicella Amarone wine’, to name but two examples. Granted access to the Internet and a telephone, Airault was allowed and encouraged to work and communicate with the outside world, but any communication between him and his servile captor was strictly forbidden – this despite the fact that meals were delivered by said captor via a basket dropped from the window twice daily. Meanwhile, in a final twist of the screw, Boullet, unbeknownst to Airault, went and impishly installed a photocopy-based work upon the windows of the curator’s nearby not-for-profit space, Le Commissariat.

It is important to note that this project, entitled *Brooding Parasite Feeding Week*, took place within the context of Boullet’s eccentric, deliberately limited, two-year-lifespan project space. Conceived by the artist as an ongoing work of art in itself, the space invites other artists and curators to reflect upon hypocrisy in one form or another (some notable participants include Merlin Carpenter and Oliver Laric). As such, *BPFW* was a work within a larger work of a relatively ambiguous albeit fluid nature, which ultimately seeks to transparently demarcate the shifty ethical parameters that underpin a fair amount of what goes on in the artworld. At once a social experiment, a personal challenge (on the part of both the artist and the curator), an allegorical reflection upon the contract between artist and curator and a so-called reversal of the power relations between the two, *BPFW* actively – as opposed to theoretically – offered a rich and investigative commentary upon the current artist– curator power struggle discourse. Literally and symbolically, it explored the extent to which the two activities are interrelated: indeed, who exactly was the parasite and who was the host here?

Such a reflection, however, should not lead one to believe that this was only a question of perversely illustrating a mutual dependency. As demonstrated by its *jusqu'au bout* logic, it was too twisted for that. Nor was it punitive. It was ameliorative. The artist himself said, in conversation: "I want to make him a better person, a better curator". Whether or not it worked is, of course, something that only time will tell. But many would argue that there is



REVIEWS: EUROPE

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*Brooding Parasite Feeding Week: Day 3, 12:00, the curator pulling up his basket receiving a whalemeat chili omelette with rice salad, 2010*