

Richard Boulet: *If I May Digress*

Canton-Sardine, Vancouver

Curated by Lam Wong, Matilde Nuzzo, and Wayne Baerwaldt

Review by Evelyn Skyberg Greer

Tucked away in the basement of a large building in Chinatown, the Canton Sardine Gallery feels like one of Vancouver's best kept secrets. A narrow hallway that opens into a small room, intimate but deliberate in its restraint. For *Richard Boulet: If I May Digress*, co-curators Lam Wong, Matilde Nuzzo, and Wayne Baerwaldt transform this compact setting into a layered landscape that mirrors the artist's own complex psyche. The show feels like stepping into Boulet's mind where every thread, poem, and button is charged with potent memory and experience.

Boulet, an Edmonton based artist with degrees in architecture, fine art, and intermedia, is known for textile works that fuse craft traditions with poetry and autobiographical reflection. His work includes embroidered text fragments, cross-stitched aphorisms, and collaged fabrics that read as both confession and critique. The exhibition's title, *If I May Digress*, captures his method perfectly. A refusal to stay linear and a belief that digression itself can be a form of truth telling.

From the first moment, Boulet's voice meets the viewer head on. Quilted into a large, chaotic work directly facing the entrance are the words: *"Have you ever seen two dogs fighting? That is a form of intimacy."* The text sits amid pixels and stitched abstractions—an anti-composition that withholds clarity until you step closer. Like much of Boulet's work, it balances obscurity and revelation. There's something almost biblical in his phrasing, yet the structure feels glitched, disobedient, and refuses coherence. The piece sets the tone for the exhibition: intimacy as conflict and beauty as disorder.

Moving deeper into the gallery feels like wandering through fragments of a life documented through craft. Judeo-Christian symbols appear alongside domestic references...floral squares, tiled patterns reminiscent of kitchen floors, quilted houses, and doilies. Boulet's art engages directly with mental health, queer identity, and the social hierarchies that continue to shape what counts as fine art.

The curatorial team allows this complexity to unfold without imposing unnecessary order. Works are hung formally, evenly lit, but their visual and thematic connections create a sense of productive clutter. The textiles talk to each other across the space. The gallery's architecture (a main room that narrows into a corridor and balcony) intensifies the experience. Hidden recesses, corners, and a tucked away hole in the staircase contribute to a sense of discovery or a descension into the subconscious.

A favorite piece, *Queer Planet*, symbolizes everything that makes Boulet's practice so powerful. Its stitched declaration reads:

Queer Planet Edmonton H.Q. Rejoice is a choice. I like Red Herrings. Ridiculous amounts of joy can be achieved from a single seed of faith in something that is greater than oneself.

At its center is an assemblage of items placed in a seemingly random array. Crocheted squares with crocheted flowers placed on top of them, paper with fabric pinned over it, and abstract woven designs, the piece reads as chaotic yet intentional. The effect is ritualistic and personal. Rage, hope, and humor coexist, stitched together with love and softness.



Queer Planet, Richard Boulet. If I May Digress, Canton-Sardine, Vancouver.

If I May Digress is not only Boulet's reclamation of craft as a site of critical discourse but also the visibility of lived experience. Of queerness, of mental health, of fragility as sources of power. The curators frame Boulet's practice as both a personal survival strategy and a public pedagogy of community building.

In an art world that still privileges restraint, Boulet's maximalism feels radical. His textiles refuse to be quiet. They chatter, play, and contradict themselves. The exhibition doesn't offer resolution, it offers presence.