

Everybody Knows This is Nowhere

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Maps show us both real and imagined ways to navigate the world. They consolidate and collapse geographic spaces so we can start to understand places we've never been, navigate new terrain with a bit more grace and see what we can't otherwise see all at once. There's a whole lot of vagary in maps too. They might show a bolded line marking the main road through town, but they don't show the potholes on that road, nor the trash that blew out the car window. There's a lot left out if a map is only about getting from one place to another.

Emmy Bright's artwork is rarely about getting from one place to another, and still nearly all of her work shows us both real and imagined ways of navigating the world. Her *Dysfunctional Mazes* visually hint at mapping, but are deliberately not about arrival at a destination. Looking at them, orientation is not the focus, instead the meandering lines keep circling, crossing over each other and going back and forth like thoughts sometimes do. The lines create smaller spaces as they overlap like venn diagrams, and those smaller spaces ask for time and meandering much more than arrival.

As a queer, Detroit-based artist Emmy is keen on the ways in which her work relates to orientation in the broadest sense. She very directly plays with expectations of gender, humor, sexuality & material. How do we orient ourselves to our desires, families, failures and what we long for? Emmy's work so generously shares both real and imagined ways of trying to navigate orientation itself, as a process punctuated by joy, confusion, belly laughs and the heartbreak of a Patsy Cline song. Regardless of medium, Emmy's work responds to personal & relatable emotional terrain/s with profound sincerity.

In *Exhaustion & Exuberance*, Jan Verwoert asks, "Could such an exuberance be a way to interrupt the order of the division of time and space imposed on social life by the culture of high performance?"¹ Emmy's karaoke performances ask this question too and exuberantly dance across the line between sad and hilarious. These performances are arguably even beyond exuberant as she wails out love songs with the same sincerity in her print and drawing-based works. She's not a "good" singer, and that's not the point. Karaoke is about a shared even sometimes raw experience, where regardless of talent, anyone can take the mic.

Emmy's work challenges formal assumptions about what art should look like, what it should reference and just how personal it gets. The artwork includes the lived experience of its maker, but it's not *about* that experience. Rather, personal references are there intentionally to get personal with the viewer. They elicit reflection, feeling feelings, and reiterate overlapping lines as we navigate love, loss & longing. Mary Oliver writes, "You do not have to be good...You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves."²

¹ Jan Verwoert, *Exhaustion & Exuberance*, Center for Advanced Visual Studies at MIT, 2008, 100.

² Mary Oliver, "Wild Geese," 1986.