

## *Meaning in the Edges*

Generally speaking, art-making is a wide open, limitless venture, with content, media, style and interpretation completely up for grabs within an artist's decision-making. Despite the endless, inherent possibilities, many of us artists are ironically preoccupied with restrictions and boundaries. Many an artist can attest to the creative problem-solving that thrives when presented with a set of rules in the studio, though Jennifer Mannebach's predilection for definitions is more than just a springboard for the creative process --it's a means to formally and conceptually analyze characteristics of the human condition.

Mannebach often speaks of her work as "drawing," though there remains in her latest works only small instances of the marks we traditionally associate with the medium. Nevertheless, lines, in a broader sense, are the basis for the compositions of her works on paper --lines that are created in the space between. Through an accumulation of collage elements, Mannebach exploits the areas where edge-meets-edge, as in her masking tape installation, *Pantheon Wave*. Using only tape, the artist renders an intricate landscape of ancient architecture on glass windows, delineating forms through carefully planned voids and precise areas of overlap.

For Mannebach, edges are not only an aesthetic modus operandi; there is meaning in those edges. *Vouchers*, a recent work on paper accented with gold leaf, reinterprets a map of Chicago, with red circles indicating areas in which housing vouchers are issued in the highest numbers. On a typical map, a network of agreed-upon borders separates neighborhoods from each other. In *Vouchers*, Mannebach draws no such lines. Instead, areas of dense patterning form the circles, and neutral colored collage makes up what surrounds them. Rather than a conversation about who is defined by which boundaries, the artist's metaphor prompts viewers to contemplate not the boundaries themselves, but what's happening on either side and why.

If *Vouchers* embodies Mannebach's skepticism towards subjective demarcations --what she refers to as the "inauthenticity of maps"-- works like *Genome Tectonics* explore the kinds of "maps" that are predetermined and finite. Here, bits of colored collage are stacked in winding bands, inspired by microscopic images of chromosome maps. These kinds of maps, inscrutable to the layman, are nevertheless the physical building blocks of life, determining the kind of existence one has on the planet. Chromosome maps also appear in Mannebach's latest sculptural works, like *Entanglement*. In these pieces, bands of flexible board encrusted with collage are joined in loops, and suspended, twisted amongst each other. Within the visual disarray of *Entanglement*, there's also an inherent, unquestionable order to the loops: no beginning, no end, no detours.

Contemplating what's subjective and unintentional, and what's absolute and premeditated, guides Mannebach's content and imagery, and it also guides her making process. Amongst the major pieces in Mannebach's studio is a wall that the artist refers to as her "sketchbook." Within cloudy, semi-transparent paper, tiny abstract collages are catalogued in a uniform grid. These bits of paper and daubs of material are actually sourced from the discards that fall on the studio floor as the artist works. Turning residue into artwork, accidental compositions into deliberate systems, parallels the delicate balance of our world that forces order upon chaos.

-Robin Dluzen, 2017  
Artist & Art Critic