

Vanessa Bersis

It's All Ahead Of You

Linda Berger's monumental work of art, now on view for the first time at the Künstlerhaus, is titled *It's All Ahead Of You*.

It's all ahead of you—what a beguiling thought! A statement filled with freedom, hope, and confidence that is underpinned by an extraordinary story beginning with a 2021 concept proposal for *On the Road Again*. The artist applied for a residency in Iran, for a collaboration with a gallery in Tehran, thinking of an immersion in the carpetmaking traditions of Isfahan and a mutual enrichment of Berger's contemporary spatial installation drawings and traditional rug weaving methods. The artistic concept interacts and creates together with local residents, envisioning a space designed for the interweaving of visual experiences, for coming together, and for communication – the expectations were high. However, the ideas ultimately never left Vienna. Two days after Linda Berger booked her flight to Tehran, Masha Jina Amini was murdered and the political situation in Iran took a turn for the worse. Travelling there was out of the question. Berger experienced a flood of thoughts followed by a chaos of emotions and an increasing sense of urgency to make an artistic statement on the situation. However, the current events required new framework conditions.

Linda Berger spread out 12 square metres of canvas in her Vienna studio, taking up almost the entire area of her workspace and creating a new, still untouched terrain. At first only emptiness, this was the cornerstone of Berger's largest work to date. *It's All Ahead Of You*, an exhilarating thought to kick-start the artistic work process. Berger set the very first stroke of colour in the middle of the canvas, with hundreds more following, bringing with them a myriad of decisions to be made as the genesis of the work advanced.

The artist mixes all colours herself, almost never using them pure. While reds of various shades dominate, yellow, blue, green, black, orange, pink, purple, magenta, violet, and brown are also seen, albeit only in flashes. They are pressed densely on, over, in, and across the canvas, overlapping each other because, while there is ink in abundance, the working surface is finite. Berger starts again and again, another line and then another emerges, tirelessly, rhythmically, she repeats her motions. A swarm of strokes gathers at lightning speed, the first line is lost in the mass, becomes downright anonymous. It is now part of a steadily growing entity, only in the densification does it become clear exactly what one is seeing. Linda Berger uses the brushstrokes to create a coexistence – connecting different surfaces into a unity and imbuing the colours with dynamism. The artist starts out physically laying on the canvas, but the more the strokes grow, the more she must gradually withdraw, shifting to avoid what is already painted, changing her position and thus her perspective, beginning to draw in different places, giving the lines more and more space until they coalesce into an ocean that floods everything with a presence that spreads beyond the edges of the taut canvas.

This mass of strokes, their principle of order, explosive presence, connection, the resulting fullness, energy, and power, the electrifying vibrancy overcome one when looking at *It's All Ahead Of You*. In the end, the very first stroke can no longer be found in the dense mass, yet its existence fuels a sense of confidence and trust that the work process has succeeded from the very start. There is an unyielding hope in *It's All Ahead Of You* that is also for the people in Iran.