

PRESS INFORMATION

Galerie Ernst Hilger

09. – 13. September 2026, Otto-Wagner-Areal (Baumgartnerhöhe 1, 1140 Wien)

Gallery Artist Statement

Bettina Willnauer – Hand-Tufted Wallpieces

Pavillon 7, 1. Stock, Zimmer 111

Bettina Willnauer's hand-tufted tapestries create a colourful, poetic world that invites us to reconsider established orders and relationships. In her visual worlds, people, animals and plants come together and merge into a shared, interwoven cosmos – ranging from scenes of cosmopolitan life to imaginative depictions of animals and plants. In doing so, the artist liberates the tapestry from its traditional role as a hybrid of craft and decoration, conceiving it instead as an independent pictorial form.

Willnauer herself describes her artistic expression as 'painting with wool'. Just as with a paintbrush, she applies the threads from the reverse side using a tufting machine, so that the motif appears mirrored on the front. The threads form not only coloured areas, but also lines, shapes and textures; individual areas of colour often blend seamlessly into one another. Threads of varying lengths create a relief-like, tactile surface, whilst the scenes themselves often remain surprisingly flat. Willnauer decidedly sees her tapestries as works of art, not as design objects. This understanding is reflected in the formats: rather than adhering to traditional carpet dimensions, she chooses the shape, size and orientation of her works according to the conventions of painting.

For Willnauer, working with textiles carries strong feminine connotations, yet the technique of tufting breaks with this association: tufting is physically demanding, heavy and loud, and the tufting machine is often referred to as a 'tufting gun', which further links the tool with notions of strength and physical assertiveness – qualities traditionally associated with masculinity. Where threads are cut or pulled out, the rhythmic structure of the tufted fabric breaks down – a sense of disorder that reinforces the presence of the works and draws the eye to the material.

For Willnauer, the choice of colour and the creative process follow an intuitive logic. She finds her subjects in her immediate surroundings, with daydreaming playing an important role. In the series *Harvest*, she approaches harvesting as both a physical act and a symbol of the entire cycle of care – from watering a plant to the moment it finally bears fruit. Behind this lies the experience that effort gradually pays off and that persistent work is eventually rewarded. Just as important, however, is the time leading up to it – the nurturing, the waiting, the allowing for growth. As a woman, Willnauer consciously associates this constant doing and carrying on with strength. Doing and letting things unfold are central to her visual worlds as well: the finished work is both the result and a trace of an exploratory creative process.

The perception of the motifs is also shaped by this openness: figures and forms sometimes only reveal themselves when viewed up close or from a greater distance, an effect that invites viewers to change their vantage point and physically engage with the work.



It is precisely in this process-oriented approach that the technique is linked to the core content of the works: for Willnauer, the interweaving of humans, animals and plants is not merely an aesthetic motif, but becomes a principle through the textile technique itself – different elements are literally linked together and woven into a new unity. The tapestry thus becomes a symbol of a structure in which different forms of life are interconnected.

Please contact gallery@hilger.at for further information



Bettina Willnauer
Naschmarkt, 2026
Hand-tufted wallpiece
60 x 60 cm