

# Gabriele Münter and the Modern World

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# Foreword

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When deciding on a topic for my dissertation, I was faced with two options; the easy option - choose a well-known artist and write about a facet of that artist's work which interested me, or the difficult option - choose a little-known artist to bring to the attention of my readers. Once I had decided to choose option two, my research began with websites and Facebook pages which related to female artists. I discovered the Facebook page, *Female Artists in History*, and was astounded at the information contained within. This blog page contains an index of between 1,600 to 2,000 names of female artists which took the curator, Christa Zaat, three years to compile. Zaat claims that the list of artists waiting to be researched is much longer.<sup>1</sup>

With so many artists to choose from, I decided to focus my research on German artists as this resonated with my German heritage. After much investigation, I finally decided on Gabriele Münter (1877-1962). Her artworks appealed to me. They appeared to be Fauvist in style, yet the colours were slightly muted, and combined with the simple forms of the subject/object, produced an unusual calming effect. When I investigated her story, I felt an affinity with this woman. Münter was deeply in love with a man whom she respected, but who treated her with disrespect. Gabriele Münter has been better known for being the mistress/muse/student of Wassily Kandinsky than being an artist in her own right. Here was a chance to re-evaluate Münter's oeuvre – to find out why she was not prominent in the art history canon as a great artist, and why her story needed to be told. Her story became my story.

Whilst researching Münter's contribution to art history, it became clear that I needed to devise a structured methodology which would present the artist in the best possible manner. This process was formulated as a five-step plan, combining the key elements required in re-evaluating an artist.

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<sup>1</sup> Christa Zaat, facebook message, 5 August, 2017.

1. **It was necessary to locate, situate, then isolate Münter within art history.**

Münter was born in 1877, in Berlin, Germany. She attended the Lyceum for Girls in Koblenz during 1890-1892 where, as part of her curriculum, she received her first formal drawing lessons. She was brought up in a liberal household, which was uncommon in German families at that time, and was allowed freedom to indulge in 'modern' activities which were thought to be unseemly for a young woman in the late nineteenth century. She decided to pursue art as a career, and moved to Munich in 1901, as this city was regarded as the 'Paris' of Germany. It was in Munich where Münter became involved with the avant-garde artistic circle, eventually joining the *Neue Künstlervereinigung München* [New Artists' Association Munich] and then *Der Blaue Reiter* [Blue Rider] Group. Having situated Münter amid the Expressionism movement of pre-World War One Germany, it was then necessary to isolate her within this movement to explicate her development as an artist.

2. **To appreciate Münter's development as an artist, it was necessary to investigate her art training and art education, and any opportunities and/or influences which may have assisted her.**

As women were refused admittance to the art academies until after World War One, the only tuition available to middle and upper-class women, in the late nineteenth century, was at privately run academies. Münter decided to pursue her art training and attended classes at the private "Women's Atelier" administered by Willy Spatz (1861-1931), a Dusseldorf Academy professor, which she found uninspiring. Münter received a significant inheritance after the death of her parents, which enabled her to afford private tuition. In Munich, there were more opportunities to attend classes at both private and government run institutions. Private tuition was by established artists who were immersed in the avant-garde movement, and willing to share their artistic experience and enlightened views. She met Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) when she became a student at the Phalanx School in 1902. Münter was regarded as a *höhere Tochter* [elevated daughter] of the middle class, therefore

having privilege to receive an art education, however, she was still subject to gender inequality in this male dominated domain.

**3. After receiving an art education, Münter was exposed to various influences which affected her artistic production. These influences needed to be identified to record the progress of her oeuvre.**

Münter was exposed to various avant-garde movements. Even though she was a pupil of Wassily Kandinsky, her artistic style developed independently from him. During a sojourn in Paris, Münter was influenced by the Fauves and Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), which encouraged her to experiment with colour as form, using the various mediums of painting, sculpture, photography, wood and lino-cut prints. However, it was the folk art *Hinterglasmalerei* [Reverse glass painting] which showed her how forms could be simplified with colour and dark contours. From that point on, Münter's oeuvre developed from Impressionism to Expressionism.

**4. Did the artist make any 'breakthroughs'? (i.e. new technique or style?)**

Upon her return to Munich from Paris, Münter made a breakthrough, from Impressionism to Expressionism, but her style was still unique. She was entranced by the folk art, *Hinterglasmalerei*, and recalled being the "first in Murnau" to study the process of producing a reverse-glass painting, firstly copying works from a master, then producing her own images. She conveyed her enthusiasm to Kandinsky and other members of the Blue Rider Group, who also experimented with this technique. Münter used the simplification of forms which she had learnt from *Hinterglasmalerei* and applied this simplification to her paintings. This was a natural progression for her, and one which Kandinsky had no part of. This simplified style came naturally to her and was in line with the modernist view on art.

**5. Using this understanding, what methods have been used to bring the artist to the attention of the twenty-first century?**

Isolating Münter within the avant-garde movement of pre-World War One Germany, has enabled me to investigate and draw attention to her art training

and education, influences and opportunities, which Münter achieved not just by privilege, but through great determination and perseverance. Münter endured discrimination based on her gender and this can still be discerned through twentieth century art criticism where she is still sidelined as Kandinsky's shadow.

I am taking Münter out of Kandinsky's shadow in revealing to the world her great contribution to art that goes beyond being a mere student, muse or lover. This study is timely given that twenty-first century art scholars are revising the gender imbalance of the past by bringing artists like Münter the recognition they deserve, through recent exhibitions of her works, and associated catalogues which relate Münter's story as an individual and unique artist.

My research and writing was in part inspired by the need to question the art historical canon which overwhelmingly privileges the male artist. I was also motivated by a sense of justice in bringing to light the contribution of an overlooked female artist. My method is also in line with current movements in twenty-first century art scholarship which seek to revise the past.

# Introduction

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Figure 1. Gabriele Münter, *Still Life with Vases, Bottles and Geraniums*, 1908/09

In describing my chosen topic, *Gabriele Münter and the Modern World*, I intend to explain how Gabriele Münter (1877-1962), deciding to pursue a career as an artist, independently sought an art education and experimented with various mediums and techniques to achieve her own unique style. Despite discrimination from the art academies, competition from her contemporary male artists, and an unstable relationship with Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), Münter forged her path to success.

Unfortunately for Münter, art historians of the twentieth century have described her as the student, muse and/or lover of Wassily Kandinsky, rather than an artist in her own right. Prior to 1992 her name was mentioned alongside Kandinsky as a member of the Blue Rider group, but without commenting on her achievements. Contemporary art historians however, have a completely different view of Münter. They acknowledge that she was an outstanding artist, independent of Kandinsky, whose contributions to art history were significant. The authors of twenty-first century publications devoted entirely to Münter comment on this oversight, and how the artworld placed Münter in Kandinsky's shadow, where she was only seen as his pupil, and her artworks were undervalued as secondary to the master male artist. The contemporary authors, Shulamith Behr, Gerhard Danzer, Helmut Friedel, Reinhold Heller, Karoline Hille, Annegret Hoberg, Isabelle Jansen, and Birgit Poppe, all write with



passion, endeavouring to bring Münter the recognition which they consider she deserves.

This dissertation will apprise the reader of Münter's significant contributions to art history, which were achieved through her forging an independent art education combined with a zealous drive to succeed, independent of Kandinsky. Renewed interest in Münter can be measured by the recent exhibitions of her works which have been held in Germany, the U.S.A. and England. These exhibitions have produced catalogues containing scholarly essays intended to appreciate Münter as an individual artist, no longer living in Kandinsky's shadow.

To fully appreciate Münter's achievements one also needs to acknowledge her background. Münter was born in Germany in 1877, brought up in a liberal household, which was uncommon in German families at this time. Her parents had spent some time living in the USA and this could possibly be the reason Münter was allowed the freedom to indulge in 'modern' activities which were thought to be unseemly for a young woman in the late nineteenth century. She rode a bicycle, was allowed to smoke, read controversial avant-garde literature, and was not forced into an early marriage. When her parents died, Münter and her sister Emmy, travelled to the USA, unaccompanied and unchaperoned, to meet their American relatives. Upon her return to Germany, she wanted to pursue art as a career, and decided to move to Munich which at the beginning of the twentieth century was regarded as the 'Paris' of Germany. It was in Munich where Münter became involved with the avant-garde artistic circle, eventually joining the *Neue Künstlervereinigung München* [New Artists' Association of Munich] and then the *Blaue Reiter* [Blue Rider] Group.

Chapter 1 *The Modern World*, provides the context in which modernity affected German women artists. 'Modern' women had gender expectations to achieve an artistic career, buoyed by the talk of emancipation by the *Frauenbewegung* [Womens' Movement]. However, these women artists were subjected to ridicule and discrimination, making their goals seem unattainable. Those few who did become career artists were still regarded as being "in the shadow of the men". This line of thinking continued throughout the twentieth century, and even in the twenty-first

century, women artists are still fighting gender imbalance in the artworld. Feminist women artists' groups, such as the Guerrilla Girls and CoUNTess, are bringing this imbalance to the attention of art institutions around the world.

Basic art training in the form of replicating patterns was part of the school curriculum, but for those women wanting to pursue a career in art, the options were few. Entrance to art academies was forbidden until 1920, and private tuition was only available to the privileged. Chapter 2 *Art Education for Women* discusses these options and explains the path chosen by Münter which gave her a diversity of art training, enabling her to appreciate all mediums.

Münter followed her formal art education with self-education. She was involved with an avant-garde artistic circle of friends, including many international artists who brought their cultural outlooks and influences into lively discussions regarding modern art. She travelled abroad and spent a year in Paris, attending lessons at a private atelier and absorbing the artistic influences which that city offered. Chapter 3 *Gabriele Münter – The Modern Woman* discusses the influences which affected her artistic production, and the development of her oeuvre.

Münter's travels exposed her to different cultures and ways of seeing which she integrated into her artworks through experimentation. Her production became more refined, and as the experimentation evolved into experience she made a breakthrough from Impressionism to Expressionism, managing to infuse the latter style with her own unique artistic vision. This breakthrough occurred when she was introduced to the Bavarian folk art of *Hinterglasmalerei* [Reverse glass painting]. Chapter 4 *Folk Art* explains the technique of this form of painting, and how it affected Münter's style – a simplified style which she retained throughout her life.

Münter was a pioneer of modernity and Chapter 5 *Nobody's Apprentice* describes how Münter, in the pre-World War One years, created artworks which captured, and documented, the lifestyle of the avant-garde. Several of these artworks also intimate that there was a gender imbalance within her circle of friends and acquaintances, and these works will be discussed in detail. Münter, and her artworks, have been much

maligned in the twentieth century, but despite a myriad of adversities, Münter created exceptional art. This chapter suggests why she has been neglected and how this situation is being rectified in the twenty-first century.

It is intended, by revealing her achievements and the enormity of her oeuvre that Münter contributed significantly to the art historical canon throughout her lifetime, and especially during the avant-garde pre-World War One period. She may not have been as theoretical as other artists, but her philosophy regarding gender imbalance deserves a place in art history alongside other revolutionary artists of her time. Throughout her lifetime she encountered ridicule by a patriarchal society and exclusion from the same opportunities which men received. She then had to endure the wrath of National Socialism, which immobilised the progression of her art, and yet, against all this adversity, she created her own style of astonishing art.

# 1. The Modern World

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## ***Malweiber: German Women and Modern Art***



Figure 2. Bruno Paul, „Sehen Sie Fräulein“, 1902.  
„Sehen Sie Fräulein es gibt zwei Arten von Malerinnen: die einen möchten heiraten, und die anderen haben auch kein Talent.“  
[You see Miss, there are two types of female artists: one would like to marry, and the other also have no talent.]<sup>2</sup>

In the ‘Modern World’ of early twentieth century Germany, art academies refused to enrol women as there was common belief that women were incapable of artistic ability as they were “focused by nature” to give birth and nurture, whilst it had been historically proven that men possessed “significant artistic productivity”.<sup>3</sup> Artistic talent was considered a male monopoly and if women tried to become artists, they were ridiculed and regarded as a ‘third sex’, a woman with man-like attributes. German art critic and publicist, Karl Scheffler, viewed women as “empty vessels, as passive shells needing fulfilment through a man, providing the harmonious “other half” to his creative, isolated individualism.”<sup>4</sup> This view was held not only by Scheffler, but also by factions of German ideology, sciences and art. Popular culture accepted this vilification of women’s artistic ability as an element of social antagonism towards women’s emancipation in general. The German people considered it a mark of perversity if a woman left her ‘place’ in society - at home caring for a husband and

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<sup>2</sup> Renate, Berger. *Malerinnen auf dem Weg ins 20. Jahrhundert* (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 1986), 136, 137.

<sup>3</sup> Reinhold Heller. *Gabriele Münter: The Years of Expressionism 1903-1920* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1997), 44.

<sup>4</sup> Birgit, Poppe. *“Ich bin Ich” Die Frauen des Blauen Reiter* (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 2011), 31.

family.<sup>5</sup> Nina Kandinsky, second wife of Wassily Kandinsky, described in her journal, a woman's 'place':

*Wenn eine Frau einen Mann richtig liebt, dann muss sie ihm den Haushalt gewissenhaft führen und auch eine gute Köchin sein. Sie muss hinter dem Mann zurücktreten and vieles aufgeben, damit er sich entfalten und ohne Sorgen arbeiten kann.*<sup>6</sup>

[If a woman loves a man properly, then she must attend to the household conscientiously and also be a good cook. She must step back from the man and give up many things so that he can develop and work without any concerns.]

Those women who wanted to be educated and pursue a career in the arts were not only discriminated against, but were also perceived as rebels who flaunted the rules of society. The patriarchal artworld mockingly called them *Malweiber* [Painting Girls], a derogatory term intended to condemn and belittle these women for wanting to enter a male dominated discipline.<sup>7</sup> In 1902 the magazine *Simplicissimus* published a caricature by Bruno Paul (Figure 2) featuring a tall, ungainly woman that one assumes is Paul's interpretation of a *Malweib*, with the title „*Sehen Sie Fräulein es gibt zwei Arten von Malerinnen: die einen möchten heiraten, und die anderen haben auch kein Talent*“ [You see Miss, there are two types of female artists: one would like to marry, and the other also have no talent].<sup>8</sup>

Ironically, most of these women did not pursue a career as an artist, but instead became art teachers, muses, or lovers of their male contemporaries.<sup>9</sup> Those women who persevered to become artists and exhibit their art, connected with women's groups which were affiliated with the socio-political *Frauenbewegung* [Women's Movement].<sup>10</sup> This movement was part of the worldwide feminist movement emancipating women. In Germany the term for feminism '*feminismus*' encountered

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<sup>5</sup> Reinhold Heller. *Gabriele Münter: The Years of Expressionism 1903-1920* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1997), 46.

<sup>6</sup> Inge, Stephan. *Das Schicksal Der Begabten Frau im schatten Berühmter Männer* (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1992), 9.

<sup>7</sup> Birgit, Poppe. *“Ich bin Ich” Die Frauen des Blauen Reiter* (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 2011), 31.

<sup>8</sup> Renate, Berger. *Malerinnen auf dem Weg ins 20. Jahrhundert* (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 1986), 136, 137.

<sup>9</sup> Birgit Poppe. *“Ich bin Ich” Die Frauen des Blauen Reiter* (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 2011), 7.

<sup>10</sup> Marsha Meskimmon. *We weren't Modern enough: Women Artists and the Limits of German Modernism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 4.

resistance with the German socialist women, who only used this word in antagonistic terms, so *Frauenbewegung* was the commonly used term to identify the German women's feminist movement.<sup>11</sup> This movement consisted of diverse groups of women, some also involved in political parties, even in public office, who supported the opinions and issues pertaining to women, using them as political statements.<sup>12</sup>

Shulamith Behr, author of *Women Expressionists*, writes that whilst women artists were not directly involved with the *Frauenbewegung*, they did believe in emancipation and 'personal freedom'. An unattributed article in the journal *Art for All (Kunst für Alle)* 1894-95 reads:

What we women of the nineteenth century demand is that we be freely given all the good gifts of life . . . so that we, as well as the men, . . . can climb the heights of art and science, that we too can enjoy maximum individual development and perfect personal freedom.<sup>13</sup>

Inspired by the notion that they could achieve personal freedom in their art, many sought tuition with avant-garde modernists.

Marianne Werefkin (1870-1938) left her classical training at the Moscow School of Art to become the private pupil of renowned Russian artist Ilja Repin (1844-1930), an association which would last ten years.<sup>14</sup> After this time she chose to pursue her own style of modern aesthetics, embodying cultural and artistic awareness, and continued her artistic training in Munich at the art school of Anton Ažbe (1862-1905), which was popular with many international students including Alexej Jawlensky (1864-1941) and Wassily Kandinsky.<sup>15</sup> In 1909, Olga Oppenheimer (1886-1941) participated in the Parisian studio of Paul Sérusier (1864-1927), and upon her return to Germany, she not only held classes in drawing and painting, but also established the *Gereonsclub*, an exhibition facility for modern art in Cologne.<sup>16</sup> Paula Becker (1876-1907) turned her

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<sup>11</sup> Karen Offen. *European Feminisms 1700-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 185.

<sup>12</sup> Marsha Meskimmon. *We weren't Modern enough: Women Artists and the Limits of German Modernism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 4.

<sup>13</sup> Shulamith Behr. *Women Expressionists* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1988), 6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>15</sup> Tanja Malycheva and Isabel Wünsche, ed., *Marianne Werefkin and the Women Artists in her Circle* (Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2017), 71-79.

<sup>16</sup> Shulamith Behr. *Women Expressionists* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1988), 9.

back on traditional art training to join the artists' colony in Worpswede, Germany and study with Fritz Mackensen (1866-1953), a gold medal winner in German Nature Lyricism, who founded the colony. Other female students who studied at the colony were Clara Westoff (1878-1954), Otilie Reylaender (1882-1965), Sophie Bötjer (1887-1966), Sophie Wencke (1874-1963), and Hermine Rohte (1869-1937). Becker and Westoff travelled to Paris where they stayed for six months, with Becker studying at the Académie Colarossi, École des Beaux-Arts, and Westoff at the Académie Rodin. In 1901 upon her return from the USA, Gabriele Münter travelled to Munich to attend the *Damenakademie* [Ladies' Academy] but soon became disinterested in their method of teaching, and joined the progressive Phalanx School where she studied with Wassily Kandinsky.<sup>17</sup>

The early twentieth century, prior to World War One, was a time of tremendous change. The modernist avant-garde aspired to “change the world by making new art”, not to gain recognition or popularity.<sup>18</sup> The German art world was excited about the new progressive art movement of Expressionism which encompassed music, theatre, dance, poetry, philosophy, and the visual arts. Expressionists sought to combine elements of each art-form in their creativity. They looked to nature for inspiration and expressed their inner emotions through their artworks.<sup>19</sup> Women artists, opera singers, poets, playwrights and dancers, were united in their modernist ideals, and were all trying to succeed in the patriarchal art world.<sup>20</sup> However, society was slow to adapt to the changes of modernism.

### ***Im Schatten der Manner: Living in the shadow of their men***

When discussing the relationships of women artists of the nineteenth century, the issue of father/artist/teacher predominates as women stayed at home and the only opportunity to achieve an art education was through a father who also happened to be an artist. However in the era of avant-garde modernism, a new set of emotional

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<sup>17</sup> Diane J. Radycki. “The Life of Lady Art Students: Changing Art Education at the Turn of the Century,” *Art Journal* 42:1 (1982): 11, accessed 3 December, 2015. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/776485>.

<sup>18</sup> Robin Walz. *Modernism* (Edinburgh Gate: Pearson Education Limited, 2008), 4.

<sup>19</sup> Birgit Poppe. *“Ich bin Ich” Die Frauen des Blauen Reiter* (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 2011), 7, 8.

<sup>20</sup> Tanja Malycheva and Isabel Wünsche, ed., *Marianne Werefkin and the Women Artists in her Circle* (Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2017), 78.

complications arose when relationships changed to husband/lover/artist.<sup>21</sup> While it was socially acceptable for a woman to be independent from her father, it was not acceptable to be independent from her husband, and she was only considered as ‘the wife of the artist’.<sup>22</sup> Petersen and Wilson (1976) suggest that the majority of women artists considered their art beneath that of their husbands’ art, and believed that such assumptions were psychologically and artistically damaging.<sup>23</sup> This may have been the case for the women artists of the *Blaue Reiter* – Gabriele Münter, Maria Marc (1876-1955), and Marianne von Werefkin.

The male and female artists of the avant-garde group the *Blaue Reiter* were experimenting with symbolic and abstract elements, creating their artworks not for aesthetic or representational value, but for their spiritual content.<sup>24</sup> Whilst the art historical canon has acknowledged the revolutionary output of the major male artists of the *Blaue Reiter*, Wassily Kandinsky, Franz Marc (1880-1916), and Alexej Jawlensky, it has not extended the same recognition to the contributions of the female artists of the *Blaue Reiter*. These women were established artists whose artistic partners were also members of the *Blaue Reiter*, yet they remained *im Schatten der Männer* [in the shadow of the men].<sup>25</sup> Brigit Poppe (2011) states even though these women were actively involved in this group, their artistic developments were measured against their partners.<sup>26</sup>

Gabriele Münter was an accomplished artist when she first met Wassily Kandinsky. Initially their relationship was that of teacher/student but over time developed into one of intimacy. Unfortunately for Münter, at times Kandinsky could not separate teacher from lover, criticising her intuitive style by referring to it as “produced from a pure inner instinct”, intimating, according to Heller, that she recorded “the dictations of nature without the interference of rationality” which was the general philosophy of

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<sup>21</sup> Karen Petersen, and J.J. Wilson. *Women Artists* (New York: New York University Press, 1976), 104.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 104.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 105.

<sup>24</sup> Brigit Poppe. *“Ich bin Ich” Die Frauen des Blauen Reiter* (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 2011), 7, 8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 8.



how women created art.<sup>27</sup> Kandinsky said to her “You are hopeless as a student – it’s impossible to teach you anything. You can do only what has germinated within you. Nature grants you everything. What I can do for you is protect your talent and nourish it so that nothing false disturbs it.”<sup>28</sup> Kandinsky proclaimed to nourish her talent, but did nothing to nourish her soul. He was quite controlling, forbidding her to dance, and designed her clothing, preferring her to wear the colour black.<sup>29</sup> Art Historian Isabelle Jansen suggests by designing Münter’s clothing, Kandinsky could influence and shape her outward appearance into the woman he wanted her to be.<sup>30</sup>

Maria Franck was also an accomplished artist when she met future fellow *Blaue Reiter* member Franz Marc. They both had similar ideals regarding aesthetic values in art, and despite society’s strictures on unmarried women, decided to live together until they could marry. While their marriage was strong, Maria’s confidence in her artistic ability began to wane as her husband’s artistic career was on the rise. Her objective evolved from ambitious young artist to the role of a supportive, nurturing wife. Her artistic production was reduced to that of secretary; organising correspondence between the artists, gallery owners, and others within their circle.<sup>31</sup>

Marianne von Werefkin met Alexej Jawlensky while she was a student with the renowned Russian painter Ilja Repin (1844-1930). They moved from Russia to Munich in 1896, where Jawlensky attended a private art school and after a short time Werefkin gave up her painting for ten years to promote Jawlensky’s talent, while supporting him both financially and emotionally.<sup>32</sup> He repaid her kindness by having an illicit affair with their housekeeper, who was fourteen years old and bore him a child.<sup>33</sup> Jawlensky

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<sup>27</sup> Reinhold Heller. *Gabriele Münter: The Years of Expressionism 1903-1920* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1997), 58.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 58.

<sup>29</sup> Norma Broude, and Mary D. Garrard, ed. *Feminism and Art History, Questioning the Litany* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 282.

<sup>30</sup> Isabelle Jansen. *Gabriele Münter und Wassily Kandinsky, Perlenstickereien und Textilarbeiten aus dem Nachlass von Gabriele Münter* (München: Gabriele Münter- und Johannes Eichner-Stiftung, 2010), 13.

<sup>31</sup> Kimberley A. Smith. „Maria Marc’s Letters,” in *Marianne Werefkin and the Women Artists in her Circle*, ed. Tanja Malycheva and Isabel Wünsche. (Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2017), 154-164.

<sup>32</sup> Birgit Poppe. *“Ich bin Ich” Die Frauen des Blauen Reiter* (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 2011), 36.

<sup>33</sup> Renate, Berger. *Malerinnen auf dem Weg ins 20. Jahrhundert* (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 1986), 254.

continued the affair with Werefkin accepting the child as her own, while all living under the same roof.<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps the men viewed their female partners as competition, and by strategically undermining their artworks as 'feminine', aligned them with the 'low' arts. By 'placing' these women in their 'shadow', the men became prominent as their own artworks were aligned with 'high' art, yet this prominence would not have been achievable had not their partners been so supportive. The male-dominated artworld, intentionally or not, fails to acknowledge this persistent issue in their recognition of female artists.

## The Twenty-first Century

Fast forward to the twenty-first century where feminism, women's rights, and the fight to be recognised as equals has finally paid off; or has it? Women are no longer forced to choose between an artistic career or being a 'good' wife, but are they recognised as equals? Some art museums and galleries, in promoting exhibitions by male artists, would have us believe that art is male.<sup>35</sup> Art institutions have the power to influence when, and why, women artists receive recognition.

The issue of gender parity within the art industry has been the focus of many feminist groups since the 1980s. The Guerrilla Girls have been fighting racism and sexism within the art industry since the group was first formed in 1985. They discovered a disparity of representations between male and female artists at most major art museums, and were frustrated at the unwillingness of the institutions to address this disproportion. So, the group set out to publicly shame and humiliate these museums. In 1989 the Guerrilla Girls targeted the Metropolitan Museum in New York with a controversial poster *Do Women have to be Naked to Get Into the Met Museum?* (1989)

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 254, 255.

<sup>35</sup> Amanda Vickery, "Bring female artists out of storage," *The Guardian*, 17 May 2014. Accessed 31 January, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/may/16/bring-women-artists-out-of-storage>

(Figure 3) which gave the shameful statistics of “Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female.”<sup>36</sup>



Figure 3. The Guerrilla Girls, *Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?*, 1989.

The group’s intention was to embarrass the art museums into reconsidering their exhibition displays and acquisition policies. In 2015 the group issued a ‘report card’ (Figure 4) on the same four art museums which they graded in 1985. The results showed that after 30 years, gender inequality is still present within the art institutions.

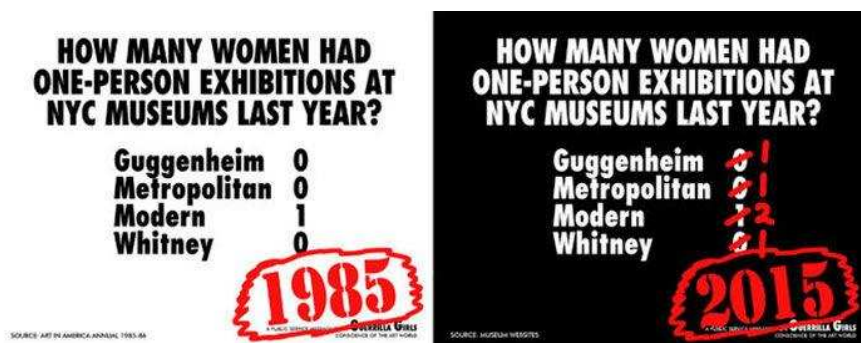


Figure 4. The Guerrilla Girls, *How many women had one-person exhibitions at NYC museums last year?*, 2015

When the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York reopened after refurbishment in 1984, it was also targeted by feminist protesters. The Women’s Caucus for Art was incensed by the underrepresentation of women artists at the inaugural exhibition titled *International Survey of Recent Paintings and Sculpture*, only 14 of the 165 artists represented were women. The protest slogan was “MOMA opens, but not to women artists”.<sup>37</sup> This event became known as the first *W.A.V.E.* (Women Artists Visibility

<sup>36</sup> Johnson, Sam. “The Guerrilla Girls: 30 years of Art Activism and Counting,” *AnOther Magazine*, 14 December, 2015, accessed 5 January 2018. <http://www.anothermag.com/art-photography/8125/the-guerrilla-girls-30-years-of-art-activism-and-counting>

<sup>37</sup> Susan Heller Anderson, and David Bird. “Protest at the Modern for More Women’s Art,” *New York Times*, 15 June, 1984, accessed 30 December, 2017. <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/06/15/nyregion/new-york-day-by-day-003594.html>

Event) or *Let MoMA Know*. It took 30 years for MoMA to publicly address the issues of this first event. Since 2014, MoMA hosts an annual Art+Feminism Wikipedia Edit-a-Thon, an event created to edit Wikipedia entries for women artists.<sup>38</sup> Two of the original founding members of Art+Feminism edit-a-thon, Siân Evans and Jacqueline Mabey, state that the 2015 event which was held over a three-day weekend in March to coincide with International Women's Day, had approximately 1,500 participants in seventy-five locations in seventeen countries on four continents. Almost four hundred new Wikipedia articles were created, and over five hundred articles extensively edited. Evans and Mabey claim that "one of the most important results of the edit-a-thon was the materialization of a community of librarians, artists, educators, and technologists engaging in feminist activism online."<sup>39</sup> The Wikipedia Edit-a-Thon is a positive contribution to the knowledge bank of women artists, however, women need to be recognised by *representation* in art institutions.

In June 2016 the Tate Modern Art Museum opened their new building with the proclamation: "Art Changes. We Change." implying their curation is becoming more inclusive. However, the activist groups of WEREISANAMENDIETA and Sisters Uncut disagreed and held a protest outside the new Tate Modern Building on the evening of the artists' preview. They protested the lack of recognition given to the late artist, Ana Mendieta (1948-1985), over her husband Carl Andre (1935-). In the new building there were no works by Mendieta on display, despite Tate Modern owning five of her works, yet Andre *was* represented. It seems that the art institution disregarded the fact that Andre stood trial for the murder of his wife. Even though he was acquitted, Mendieta's fans remember her death as suspicious, as she fell 34 floors from the window of the apartment she shared with her husband.<sup>40</sup> A major retrospective of Andre's works toured world-wide for five years, and as journalist Maya Gurantz claims

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<sup>38</sup> Alex Greenberger. "MoMA Announce Fourth Annual Art+Feminism Wikipedia Edit-a-Thon," *Artnews*, 8 February, 2017, accessed 27 April, 2017.

<http://www.artnews.com/2017/02/08/momaannouncesfourthannualartfeminismwikipediaeditathon/>

<sup>39</sup> Siân Evans, Jacqueline Mabey, and Michael Mandiberg. 2015. "Editing for Equality: The Outcomes of the Art+Feminism Wikipedia Edit-a-thons," *Art Documentation: Bulletin Of The Art Libraries Society Of North America* 34, no. 2 (2015): 194, 195, accessed 29 December, 2017. URL:

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lih&AN=111312513&site=ehost-live>

<sup>40</sup> Isabella Smith. "Protestors demand "Where is Ana Mendieta?" in Tate Modern expansion," *Hyperallergic*, 14 June, 2016, accessed 9 August, 2017. <https://hyperallergic.com/305163/protesters-demand-where-is-ana-mendieta-in-tate-modern-expansion/>

“many people remain convinced he was responsible for her death, and every opening of the retrospective has inspired protests”.<sup>41</sup> According to Gurantz the final destination of this tour in July 2017 was at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MoCA) in Los Angeles which was not “well attended”. Despite the protests and the low attendance figures, the director of the MoCA, Philippe Vergne, made no comment of Mendieta, but he was known to remark previously: “Carl broke something, and he was ostracized, and it’s part of the story. But the work is there. We are a museum, not a court of law, and he is one of the most important artists of our time.”<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile in Australia, Elvis Richardson, author of a blog called *CoUNTess*, conducted research on gender parity and representation in the Australian artworld and published her findings in February 2016 under the title of *The Countess Report*. Richardson asks the question “Why so many female visual art graduates (74%) and so few female artists in the commercial and museum sector (40%)?”<sup>43</sup> Richardson’s research reveals that when international survey exhibitions are held in state museums, “the local commercial galleries are simultaneously more likely to exhibit a male than female artist.” While the museums “represent the state sanctioned height of artistic merit and as such the data reveals how tradition and discrimination hide within the notion of artistic excellence and merit.” As exhibiting is by invitation only, the museums draw on the artists who are represented by commercial galleries, who in turn, favour male artists.<sup>44</sup> This information brings to light the fact that not much has changed in over one hundred years regarding the representation of female artists in museums and galleries.

Prior to World War One, German women wanting to pursue a career as an artist suffered ridicule and discrimination from society and the restraints of the patriarchal art domain. They were forbidden to enter the Art Academies and only women of ‘privilege’ could seek alternative art education. Those that did follow the path of

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<sup>41</sup> Maya Gurantz. ““Carl Broke Something”: On Carl Andre, Ana Mendieta, and the Cult of the Male Genius,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 10 July, 2017, accessed 21 July, 2017. <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/carl-broke-something-on-carl-andre-ana-mendieta-and-the-cult-of-the-male-genius/>

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Elvis Richardson. *The Countess Report*. Accessed 8 Jan 2018. <http://thecountessreport.com.au>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

private education, still needed the support of the patriarchal society to be able to exhibit their works. Such was the case for Gabriele Münter. She moved to Munich, a city renowned for its progressive attitude towards women, to seek opportunities to further her education and desired career as an artist. To publicly exhibit her artworks, she joined the avant-garde groups of *Neue Künstlervereinigung München* [New Artists' Association of Munich] and then the *Blaue Reiter* [Blue Rider] Group, as the presence of men within these groups ensured that the exhibition would be seen as legitimate. Initially Münter's relationship with Kandinsky was that of teacher/student, but as they became emotionally involved, Kandinsky criticised her artworks through professional and personal jealousy, claiming them to be naïve and feminine, qualities which were consistent with the applied or low arts. High art was considered to be carefully planned artworks, created by men. This issue has plagued women artists throughout the centuries and can be one explanation why they have been placed in the shadow of men. Feminist and women's rights groups have been protesting gender inequality in the artworld since the 1970s, yet research shows that in the twenty-first century, not much has changed to rectify this gender imbalance. Art institutions still hold the power to decide when, and why women artists should be recognised and represented. To bring women artists, like Münter, out of the shadow and into the spotlight, art historians must isolate the artists from the 'shadow maker', concentrating on her education, skills, and abilities to produce art that is worthy of recognition.

## 2. Art Education for Women

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Figure 5. Photograph of Gabriele Münter's class at the Damenakademie, 1901

Art education in Germany, at the end of the nineteenth century, included drawing as part of the curriculum. Drawing was viewed as an important skill essential “to achieve a balanced and comprehensive intellectual, practical and emotional education,” and some schools incorporated eight hours of drawing a week, with emphasis on accurate replication. While the standard drawing lesson encouraged mind-eye co-ordination, it was not intended to be artistic.<sup>45</sup> Drawing instruction was considered, by the government, an important part of the high school curriculum, therefore creating an opportunity for women artists to be trained as qualified drawing teachers.<sup>46</sup> However, certain societies viewed art education as the privilege of the social elite. In nineteenth century Europe, women could study decorative arts, while the study of fine arts “except under highly unusual circumstances”, was restricted to men only. Arthur Efland states that throughout the history of art education “access to instruction was affected by class, gender, and the general social status of the visual arts as a subject for study” and that the political, cultural, scientific, and economic events of a society also affected that society's attitude towards art education.<sup>47</sup> In the 1920s, art education consisted of drawing and painting typically experienced during childhood

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<sup>45</sup> Reinhold Heller. *Gabriele Münter: The Years of Expressionism 1903-1920* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1997), 38.

<sup>46</sup> Birgit Poppe. *“Ich bin Ich” Die Frauen des Blauen Reiter* (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 2011), 150.

<sup>47</sup> Arthur D. Efland. *A History of Art Education, Intellectual and Social Currents in Teaching the Visual Arts* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1990), 1-6.

development, and part of a framework of progressive education. After 1933, the Nazi's education policy changed all facets of school education to follow national socialist ideology. It was not until after World War Two in 1945, that the Federal Republic of Germany, restructured the subject of art education, and integrated Bauhaus design principles which encouraged creativity.<sup>48</sup>

## Options Available for Women Artists in Germany

In Wilhelmine Germany, art academies refused to accept women. In 1906 the Royal Academy School for Fine Arts in Berlin advertised a notice "*Schülerinnen finden keine Aufnahme*" [female students will find no admission].<sup>49</sup> Women artists were considered 'unfeminine' if they pursued professional art training. They were ridiculed, belittled, and mockingly called *Malweiber* [Painting girls] by the art academies, critics, and fellow male artists.<sup>50</sup> This derogatory term was designed to deter women from continuing a professional art education. Women were also forbidden to attend nude model life-drawing classes, a study of anatomy which is an essential part of art training. This taboo was based on moral grounds. Viewing a nude male model in the presence of their male colleagues was considered to threaten the chastity of the women.<sup>51</sup> As a professional academic art education for women was not available until after World War One, the only possibilities available were either private tuition or study beyond the borders of Germany.<sup>52</sup> Berlin and Munich operated drawing courses specifically for women who wanted to become qualified to teach. In 1867 the "*Institut für höheren weiblichen Zeichenunterricht*" [Institute for Higher Female Drawing Instruction] was founded in Berlin, and in Munich, a department within the *Königlichen Kunstgewerbeschul* [Royal Arts and Crafts School] was opened for female drawing students in 1872. Until 1910 roughly 60 Arts and Crafts Schools and Technical colleges existed in Germany, of which 12 were reserved for women, and 37 were co-educational, offering women the opportunity to sit for state examinations.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Georg Peez. Ed. *Art Education in Germany* (Munster: Waxmann, 2015), 15.

<sup>49</sup> Diane J. Radycki, "Töchter of Feminism: Germany and the Modern Woman Artist," *Historically Speaking*, 14, 6 (2013): 43, accessed 6 July, 2016. DOI: 10.1353/hsp.2013.0060.

<sup>50</sup> Birgit Poppe. "*Ich bin Ich*" *Die Frauen des Blauen Reiter* (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 2011), 31.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 150.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 150.



Women artists who did not want to become teachers, but wanted to pursue an artistic career as a professional artist were frustrated that they could not receive proper training and the opportunity to exhibit their artworks; both these opportunities were obstructed by the patriarchal culture of society. Many of these women connected with women's groups which were affiliated with the socio-political *Frauenbewegung*, a movement which could lobby for their right to receive a professional art education.<sup>54</sup> Diane Radycki states that women artists were trying to gain access to formal education at a time when the perception of art was becoming less academic and representational, and more personal and individual,<sup>55</sup> and male artists were rejecting the principles of the academic system.<sup>56</sup> As they were excluded from the academies and state exhibitions, women artists realised that to receive training and exposure, it would be necessary to seek art education within private establishments. Most art institutions available at that time catered for dilettantes; women who wanted to pursue employment, or fill in time until they were married.<sup>57</sup> The alternatives were either *Privatakademien* [private academies], *Damenateliers* [ateliers for women], *Künstlerinnenorganisationen* [women artist associations], or *Staatliche Akademien* [state academies], which were open to the privileged *höhere Töchter* [higher daughters] of middle-class families.<sup>58</sup>

Only three *Privatakademien* existed in Germany at the turn of the twentieth century - Berlin, Munich and Karlsruhe. These private academies were established by women solely for the purpose of instructing women in art education. The *Damenmalakademie des Münchner Künstlerinnenvereins* [Ladies' Painting Academy of the Munich Women Artists' Association] was founded in 1882 by twelve students from the *Königlichen Kunstgewerbeschule* [Royal School of Arts and Crafts].<sup>59</sup> Women would pay an annual

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>55</sup> Diane J. Radycki, "The Life of Lady Art Students: Changing Art Education at the Turn of the Century," *Art Journal* 42:1 (1982): 13, accessed 3 December, 2015. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/776485>.

<sup>56</sup> Shulamith Behr. *Women Expressionists*, (Oxford: Phaidon, 1988), 6.

<sup>57</sup> Reinhold Heller. *Gabriele Münter: The Years of Expressionism 1903-1920* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1997), 42.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>58</sup> Birgit Poppe. *"Ich bin Ich" Die Frauen des Blauen Reiter* (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 2011), 150.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 150.

fee of 400 *Mark* while men paid only 80 *Mark* at the Academy. Both Gabriele Münter and Maria Franck were students at this academy.<sup>60</sup>

*Damenateliers* or ateliers for Women, were not actually run by women but male artists who would open their studios to female students, offering them basic art training. There were few of these ateliers available and the classes would fill quickly. They were overcrowded with hardly any room for an easel, and insufficient time for the teacher to regularly check the student's progress.<sup>61</sup>

Many cities in Germany had *Künstlerinnenorganisationen*, including Munich, Karlsruhe, Dresden, and Leipzig which were formed in paradigm to the *Vereins der Künstlerinnen und Kunstfreundinnen Berlins* [Berlin Association of Women Artists and Art Friends]. Author Birgit Poppe, states that in 1910, Käthe Kollwitz(1867-1945) founded the *Frauenkunstverbandes* [Women's art association] and at the first meeting a decision was made to approach the academies and demand that women be allowed admission. This principle of equality was enforced, initially in the Weimar Republic, so that the academies could no longer reject women.<sup>62</sup>

According to Birgit Poppe, in 1902 the *Staatliche Akademien* in Königsberg and Weimar allowed women admission, however, the women's class in Königsberg closed shortly thereafter due to a "lack of space". At the same time the state academy in Stuttgart, made available twelve placements for women, and regardless of their age, these women were required to have permission from their parents or guardian to attend. Women were excluded from the life drawing and painting sessions, and separated from the male students for their lessons. The larger academies in Berlin and Munich continued to refuse admittance to women.<sup>63</sup>

In Munich, most women enrolled in the *Künstlerinnen-Vereine* [Women Artists' Association] which was founded in 1882 encouraged by the social actions of women's

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 150.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 150.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 150.

groups. The art school of the Women Artists' Association opened its doors in 1883 teaching the required drawing composition, figure drawing, and painting, delivered by instructors from the *Königlich-Bayerischen Kunstakademie* [The Royal Bavarian Art Academy].<sup>64</sup> Gabriele Münter, Käthe Kollwitz and Paula Modersohn-Becker all attended *Künstlerinnen-Vereine* for their initial training. As these associations had limited facilities and the quality of formal education was poor, most women artists who were serious about pursuing art as a career, chose training by individual artists, in their studios.<sup>65</sup>

## **Gabriele Münter – 'höhere Tochter'**

During the years 1890 to 1892 in Münter's drawing class at the Koblenz Lyceum for Girls, students were required to replicate abstract and ornamental patterns in special exercise books which contained gridlines to help the student maintain accuracy. Münter completed these standard lessons but also rendered many freehand drawings in the back of her exercise book. Her artistic ability was soon recognized by her teachers and she was encouraged to replicate portrait paintings and sculptures by well-known contemporary German artists.<sup>66</sup>

In the spring of 1896 Münter received private drawing lessons from a member of the art organisation *Malkiste*, based in Herford, and in May 1897 she travelled to Dusseldorf to attend private drawing lessons with Ernst Bosch (1834-1917), a portrait and genre painter.<sup>67</sup> A few months later she enrolled in the *Damenatelier* of Willy Spatz, a professor of the Dusseldorf Academy, but she found the lessons uninspiring and later recalled: "Nobody there seemed to take seriously the artistic ambitions of a mere girl".<sup>68</sup> Münter left the Dusseldorf academy when her mother became ill and she did not resume formal lessons until her return from the USA in 1901.

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<sup>64</sup> Anne Mochon. *Gabriele Münter: Between Munich and Murnau* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Fog Art Museum, 1980), 14.

<sup>65</sup> Shulamith Behr. *Women Expressionists*, (Oxford: Phaidon, 1988), 5, 6.

<sup>66</sup> Reinhold Heller. *Gabriele Münter: The Years of Expressionism 1903-1920* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1997), 38.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 42.

Heller notes that the drawings in Münter's USA sketchbooks show that she applied the skills she had previously learnt, but with increasing sophistication. Her preferred simplified single figure drawings were well composed, avoiding predictable centring, an inclination perhaps that Münter may have been influenced by the illustrations of major *Jugendstil* artists, presented in popular magazines and periodicals at that time. Art historian Reinhold Heller claims that Münter "went beyond the lessons taught to her by academic teachers, and independently sought out, observed and studied the works of German artists striving to define a new modern style."<sup>69</sup>

Enthusiastic from her American trip, Münter had decided that she wanted to become a professional artist. In January 1901, she took private lessons with Hermann Küppers (1842-1929), a portrait and monument sculptor located in Bonn but left within a short time as she found the lessons unsatisfactory.<sup>70</sup>

Münter was regarded as a privileged *höhere Tochter* [higher daughter] of a middle-class family which allowed her to gain access to alternative private art education.<sup>71</sup> As Münter wanted to continue her formal art training and could afford tuition at a private academy, having received a significant inheritance after the death of her parents,<sup>72</sup> she decided to travel to Munich which, at that time, was considered the avant-garde art capital of Germany. Munich was also well-known for being a "female-friendly city", however women artists were forbidden to enter the famous *Königlich-Bayerischen Kunstakademie* [Royal Bavarian Art Academy] until the 1920s.<sup>73</sup> Munich was renowned for its academies and Women Artist Associations which supported women in the arts. In 1901 she sought admittance to the *Damenakademie* [Ladies' Academy] one of only three schools in Germany organized by women, for the sole purpose of instructing women in art education. The *Damenakademie* fostered an atmosphere of support and purpose ensuring that the students would gain confidence in their own abilities to become professional artists. Teachers were usually men from the official academies, and Münter's initial class, which concentrated on portrait drawing, was led

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 42, 43.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>73</sup> Birgit Poppe. "Ich bin Ich" *Die Frauen des Blauen Reiter* (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 2011), 31.

by Maximilian Dasio (1865-1954) (see Figure 5). The sitters were local working-class women and the objective of the lessons was to not only produce a likeness, but for the student to render their own type of character representation. Dasio also conducted a summer school in outdoor landscape drawing (*plein-air*), which since 1900 was part of the curriculum of even the official German academies. This was Münter's first *plein-air* experience. Dasio's class introduced his students to contemporary art practices and subject matters through formal lessons, but Münter found these lessons uninspiring.<sup>74</sup> She did however, return for the 1901 winter semester, finding Dasio replaced by Angelo Jank (1868-1940) as instructor of the portrait drawing class. Jank was impressed by her abilities and quickly promoted her to the life drawing class, but despite her achievements she was still dissatisfied with her progress.<sup>75</sup>

During her stay in Munich, Münter would visit the latest art exhibitions. It was at the second Phalanx-sponsored exhibition of the Darmstadt artists where she first learnt about the Phalanx School, a private school run by artists with avant-garde ideals, which had a reputation for accepting female students. The Phalanx was founded in May 1901 by a small group of avant-garde artists, with the intention of operating as an art exhibition society. The founding members Waldemar Hecker (1873-1958) and Wilhelm Hüsgen (1877-1962), sculptors, Rolf Niczky (1881-1950), painter and illustrator, and Wassily Kandinsky, painter and chairman. The purpose of Phalanx was to provide an exhibition space outside the established institutional system, to introduce progressive foreign and local artists to the city of Munich. While the concept was innovative, the exhibitions on their own were financially unviable. To supplement their income Kandinsky, Hüsgen and Hecker opened a private art school in late 1901, early 1902 which became known as The Phalanx School.<sup>76</sup> The curriculum at the Phalanx was based on academic teaching of drawing, painting, and sculpture, with an emphasis on life drawing. Unlike the *Damenakademie*, where female models would modestly cover their pubic area and male models would wear bathing trunks, the models at the Phalanx were completely nude. While this was not unusual in the men-only classes at

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<sup>74</sup> Reinhold Heller. *Gabriele Münter: The Years of Expressionism 1903-1920* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1997), 52.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

the Academies, women art students were forbidden to see a totally nude figure. However, the teachers at the Phalanx school were enlightened and their classes allowed both male and female art students to participate. The class sizes were small allowing more interaction between the teacher and student.<sup>77</sup>

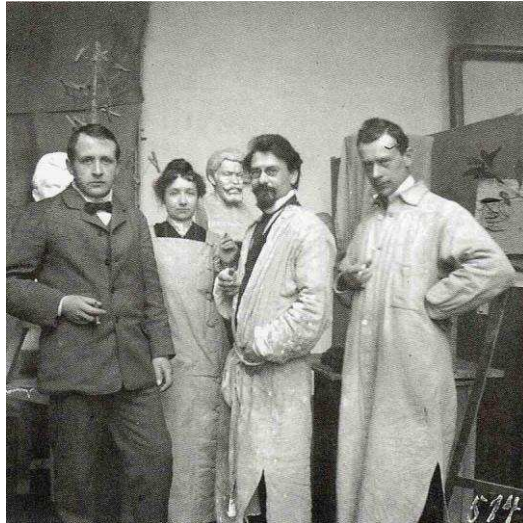


Figure 6. Photograph of Wilhelm Hüsgen's class at the Phalanx School, 1902

Münter was attracted to learning sculpture after seeing the portrait masks created by Hüsgen on display at the second exhibition. She admired these masks, portraits of the participants of the *Eleven Executioners* cabaret, with whom she was familiar, and enrolled in Hüsgen's sculpture class (Figure 6). She completed several realistic nude sculptures under Hüsgen's instruction and proudly photographed one of her creations. (Figure 7). Sadly, these sculptures no longer exist.<sup>78</sup>

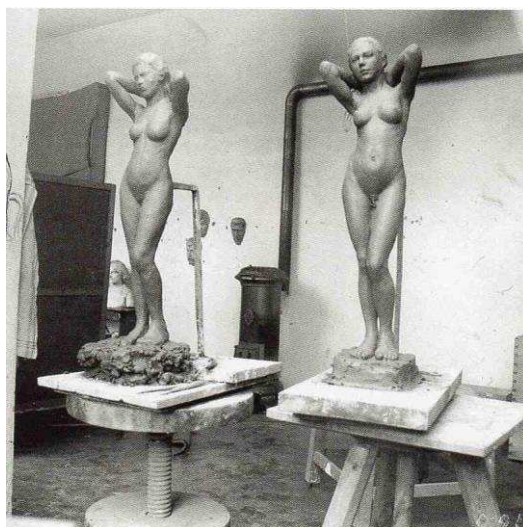


Figure 7. Photograph of life model sculpture studies - Gabriele Münter (L), 1902.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 54.

While the sculpture classes at the Phalanx satisfied her desire to shape form, it was the life drawing classes, a required element of the curriculum, which made a significant impression on the future direction of her art. Münter encountered Kandinsky for the first time in the life drawing class which he taught. According to Heller, Kandinsky spent time with his students, critiquing and encouraging, especially those women aspiring to be professional artists.<sup>79</sup> In Kandinsky's painting classes Münter learnt the basic techniques of painting and created her first oil painting, a still life study, which Kandinsky praised as "fresh and colourful". Münter's artistic direction changed from sculpture to painting. She had found a form of expression which inspired her. She no longer doubted her ability to succeed as a professional artist.<sup>80</sup>

As a student in Kandinsky's class at the Phalanx School, Münter learnt the technique of painting with a palette knife, and attended his summer schools *plein-air* painting in the countryside surrounding Munich. Kandinsky also taught her the rudiments of wood-cut printing, a process which she would later develop into a sophisticated artform. She may have learnt from Kandinsky, but her development as an artist was the result of her own tenacity.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 54.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 54.

### 3. Gabriele Münter – The Modern Woman

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Figure 8. Gabriele Münter, *Auf dem Weg zum Ausflugsdampfer auf dem Mississippi, St Louis, 1900*

Gabriele Münter was the personification of a ‘Modern Woman’. She enjoyed sports, swimming, and bicycling even though at the end of the nineteenth century the bicycle was regarded as “*eine neue und verpönte Fortbewegungsart*” [a new and frowned upon mode of movement] for women, and considered improper and unladylike to ride one.<sup>81</sup> Münter also participated in other ‘modern’ activities – smoking, reading modernist literature and magazines, and believed in women pursuing a profession and not entering into an early marriage, a state which her mother (Minna) explained, was her “birthright to happiness”.<sup>82</sup>

#### American Odyssey

Gabriele Münter embraced modernity, and with her older sister Emmy, flaunted social convention by travelling, unaccompanied by a chaperon, to the USA in the years 1898 to 1900. They travelled from Rotterdam by ocean-steamer to New York, then to Missouri, Arkansas, and Texas, arriving back in New York in October 1900 to board the

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<sup>81</sup> Birgit Poppe. *“Ich bin Ich” Die Frauen des Blauen Reiter* (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 2011), 12, 18.

<sup>82</sup> Gisela Kleine. *Gabriele Münter und Wassily Kandinsky: Biographie eines Paares* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1992), 85.



ocean-steamer “Pennsylvania” back to Germany.<sup>83</sup> The purpose of the journey was to meet relatives from her mother’s family, and Münter departed Germany with the notion to fill her sketchbooks with drawings to document the adventure. Her first sketchbook contained portrait drawings of random fellow passengers, coastal landscapes, and even orienteering notations of New York city.<sup>84</sup> Münter was amazed at the technological advances of this city; electrically lit advertising signs, escalators in huge department stores, hot and cold running water in every new home, and young women riding bicycles wearing pants.<sup>85</sup> The sisters enjoyed outings to the opera, several musical productions, and also visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art.<sup>86</sup>

After her arrival in the USA, Münter was gifted a *Kodak Bull’s Eye No. 2* camera and her sketchbook was relegated to the background, as she later noted “(. . .) *ich fotografierte anstatt zu zeichnen*” [“( . . . ) I photographed instead of drawing].<sup>87</sup> Münter experimented with photography, capturing over 400 photographs of relatives and friends, local inhabitants of the towns and cities she visited, as well as landscapes and images of everyday American life. These images were not just holiday ‘snaps’, but were thoughtfully composed works of art, as can be seen in Figures 8, and 9.<sup>88</sup> This was not an easy task as Münter was required to look down, into the viewfinder, to achieve the desired composition, whilst trying to hold the camera steady.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Helmut Friedel et al., *Gabriele Munter - Die Reise nach Amerika, Photographien 1899-1900* (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2006), 222.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>85</sup> Gisela Kleine. *Gabriele Münter und Wassily Kandinsky: Biographie eines Paares* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1992), 62, 85.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 61.

<sup>87</sup> Helmut Friedel et al., *Gabriele Munter - Die Reise nach Amerika, Photographien 1899-1900* (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2006), 179.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 179.

<sup>89</sup> Gisela Kleine. *Gabriele Münter und Wassily Kandinsky: Biographie eines Paares* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1992), 70.



Figure 9. Gabriele Münter, *Frau mit Sonnenschirm am Hochufer des Mississippi, bei St. Louis*, 1900

Photography became a new form of expression and an important part of her development as an artist. The process also aided in expanding her collection of motifs.<sup>90</sup> The contrasts of populated cities and the prairie plains presented an exciting challenge and an opportunity to refine her artistic skills. Art historian Isabelle Jansen, claims that Münter invented a series of photographs, with the same object present in each photograph (but in different cities); a process which was extremely modern for its time. Jansen further claims that Münter was of the same mind as the Conceptual artists of the 1970s, who used the photograph as a neutral medium to capture reality for use in future works.<sup>91</sup> For Münter, photography was a source of inspiration and motivation in her development as an artist, with motifs from her photographs appearing in her later artworks.

## Munich and Paris

Münter returned to Germany enthusiastic about pursuing a career as an artist. The time spent visiting her relatives in the USA enhanced her 'American Strain' and reinforced her ideals of independence, and financial autonomy through a profession rather than marriage. She was in awe of the freedom which these young American

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<sup>90</sup> Helmut Friedel et al., *Gabriele Münter - Die Reise nach Amerika, Photographien 1899-1900* (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2006), 186.

<sup>91</sup> *ibid*, 185.

women enjoyed. While they held similar beliefs and ideals as young German women, the difference was the extent to which the American women had been emancipated from 'male authority'.<sup>92</sup>

In 1901 she was encouraged by Margaret Susman (1872-1966), a fellow student from the Dusseldorf academy, to move to Munich to seek a formal art education. Susman conveyed to Münter how Munich was a modern, forward-thinking city which was 'female friendly'.<sup>93</sup> Munich offered women art students a wide choice of classes including life modelling sessions, and the opportunity to connect with other like-minded women through women's organisations, cafes, and lodging houses.<sup>94</sup> Münter lived with Sussman in the artists' quarter of Schwabing, the hub of bohemian life. The avant-garde would meet in the cafes, participate in cabarets, and attend costume balls, Münter included.<sup>95</sup> In Munich she connected with an artistic circle of friends, including many international artists such as Wassily Kandinsky, Alexej Jawlensky, and Marianne von Werefkin who brought their cultural outlooks and influences into lively discussions regarding modern art.

In 1902 Kandinsky invited Münter to attend his summer school held in the Bavarian village of Kochel, where he conducted his lessons in *plein-air* painting. As Münter was the only woman within the small group to own a bicycle, she and Kandinsky had the opportunity of riding alone together on sketching tours.<sup>96</sup> It was during this time that their relationship developed beyond friendship. However, as Kandinsky was already married and his wife had accompanied him to Kochel, Kandinsky asked Münter to leave as he could not contain his feelings towards her.<sup>97</sup> Back in Munich the next

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<sup>92</sup> Gisela Kleine. *Gabriele Münter und Wassily Kandinsky: Biographie eines Paares* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1992), 85.

<sup>93</sup> Anne Mochon. *Gabriele Münter: Between Munich and Murnau* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Fog Art Museum, 1980), 16.

<sup>94</sup> Irit Rogoff. "Tiny anguishes: reflections on nagging, scholastic embarrassment, and feminist art history." *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 4.3 (1992): 38+. Accessed 24 July, 2016. [http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.csu.edu.au/ps/i.do?&id=GALE|A14080896&v=2.1&u=csu\\_au&it=r&p=EAIM&sw=w](http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.csu.edu.au/ps/i.do?&id=GALE|A14080896&v=2.1&u=csu_au&it=r&p=EAIM&sw=w)

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Anne Mochon. *Gabriele Münter: Between Munich and Murnau* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Fog Art Museum, 1980), 16.

<sup>97</sup> Annegret Hoberg, and Shulamith Behr, Barnaby Wright. *Gabriele Münter: The Search for Expression 1906-1917* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2005), 22.

Autumn, Kandinsky's attentions continued but Münter did not want to keep the relationship secret. She noted in an unsent letter to Kandinsky:

... I have always so despised and hated any kind of lying and secrecy that I just could not lend myself to it. If we cannot be friends in the eyes of the world I must do without entirely – I want no more than I can be open about and I want to be responsible for what I do – otherwise I am unhappy . . .<sup>98</sup>

Although tension was already present in their relationship, Münter reluctantly agreed to attend Kandinsky's 1903 summer school, this time held in Kallmunz, in northern Bavaria. Kandinsky related to Münter that his wife had "released him on amicable terms" enabling him the freedom to be with Münter. With this they became secretly engaged.<sup>99</sup> The first few years of their new relationship was problematic as they did not want to be seen living together until Kandinsky's divorce was finalised, but Kandinsky was impatient and wanted to get away from Munich and his wife, and insisted of Münter a trial period of being together. The solution to this problem was a peripatetic lifestyle over the next four years. Between 1904 to early 1906 the couple travelled extensively around Germany, Holland, Tunisia, Italy, and Switzerland, before arriving in Paris in May 1906 for an extended stay of one year.<sup>100</sup> During these years Münter's style of painting did not alter from the palette knife technique which Kandinsky had taught her in Kallmunz and she made only a few paintings. Münter was fascinated with the native people and landscapes, especially in Tunisia and Italy. She filled her sketchbooks with drawings, and took many photographs from which she created lino-cut prints. In 1905 while in Tunisia she photographed a small mausoleum in the town of Sousse (Figure 10) but waited until she was in Paris to create a lino-cut print titled *Marabout*, 1907 (Figure 11) to include with her exhibits in the 1908 Salon d'Automne.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Annegret Hoberg. *Wassily Kandinsky and Gabriele Münter: Letters and Reminiscences 1902-1914*, trans. Ian Robson (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1994), 38.

<sup>99</sup> Annegret Hoberg, and Shulamith Behr, Barnaby Wright. *Gabriele Münter: The Search for Expression 1906-1917* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2005), 23.

<sup>100</sup> Anne Mochon. *Gabriele Münter: Between Munich and Murnau* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Fog Art Museum, 1980), 17.

<sup>101</sup> Ingrid Mössinger, and Thomas Friedrich, ed., *Gabriele Munter, Werke im Museum Gunzenhauser* (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2008), 64, 65.

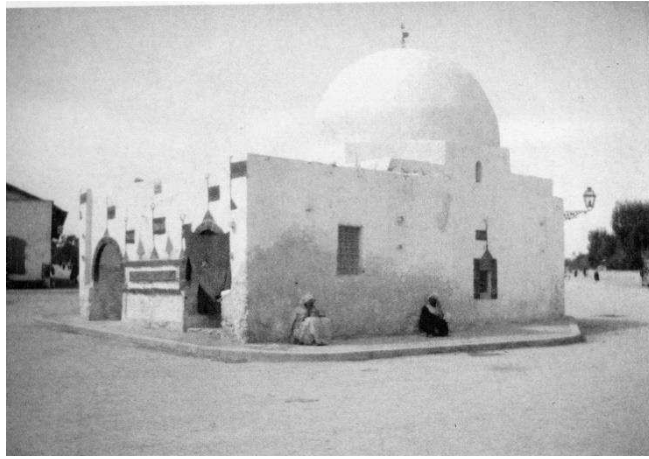


Figure 10. Gabriele Münter, *Kleines Mausoleum (Zaouia) mit zwei hockenden Gestalten, Sousse, 1905*

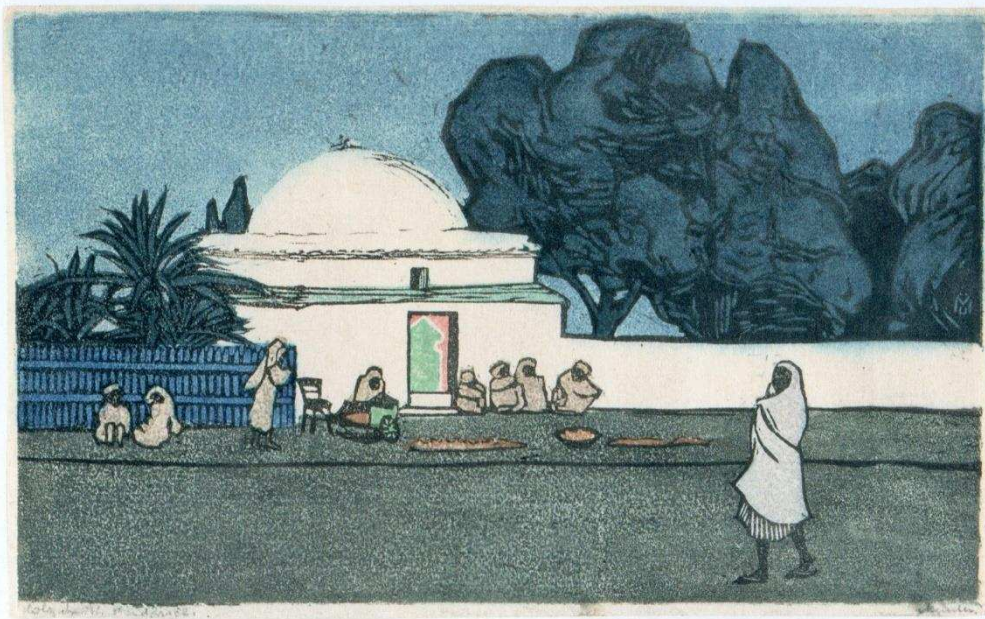


Figure 11. Gabriele Münter, *Marabout, 1907*

Münter and Kandinsky arrived in Paris in May 1906 and took up residence in the suburb of Sèvres. They both continued their painting with a palette knife in the Impressionist style, with landscape scenes of the streets and parks of Paris. Tensions arose in their relationship, once again, so Münter moved into Paris city and rented a room there on her own.<sup>102</sup> She took the opportunity to visit various museums and art galleries and absorb the influences of the Parisian avant-garde. She noted in her sketchbooks several names of major Impressionist and post-Impressionist artists who were exhibiting in Paris at that time. According to Mochon, the names included Gauguin, Van Gogh, Monticelli, Redon, Bonnard, Cézanne, Matisse, Morisot, Degas,

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<sup>102</sup> Anne Mochon. *Gabriele Münter: Between Munich and Murnau* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Fog Art Museum, 1980), 18.

Signac and Renoir, in that order.<sup>103</sup> Münter also visited the Salon d'Automne (1906) with Kandinsky as he had several exhibits there. The Salon also simultaneously held an exhibition of Russian modern art, and a retrospective exhibition of Paul Gauguin's work.<sup>104</sup>

She met many young artists and became a regular at the salons of Gertrude Stein and her brother Michael Stein.<sup>105</sup> Münter also attended a drawing class at the *Académie Grande Chaumière* for one month. Her instructor was Theophile Steinlen (1859-1923), a graphic artist renowned in France, who encouraged and impressed Münter. She recorded his statement to her: "With your drawing you will attain great things."<sup>106</sup> However, it was in the graphic arts of wood and lino-cut prints where she made significant advancement. Münter had learned the coloured wood-cut technique from Kandinsky while in Kallmunz, but in Paris she was influenced by the new French woodcut; a revival, by the Modernists of the late nineteenth century, of the old technique of making woodcuts, breaking away from the traditional composition and instead creating impetus by simplifying form.<sup>107</sup> Mochon states that the experimental colour printing methods were developed in France, and in the 1890s artist Felix Vallotton (1865-1925) created portraits in which he located the sitter in a background "which referred to their interests or environment".<sup>108</sup> Annegret Hoberg states that it was in the medium of graphic arts that Münter and Kandinsky went in different directions; while Kandinsky created colour woodcut prints with motifs of "märchenhaft-nostalgische Blätter" ["nostalgic fairy-tale prints"], Münter created colour graphic prints of portraits, from wood and lino-cuts.<sup>109</sup> Münter experimented with this colour printing technique in her portraits, an example of which can be seen in

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>105</sup> Irit Rogoff. "Tiny anguishes: reflections on nagging, scholastic embarrassment, and feminist art history." *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 4.3 (1992): 38+. Accessed 24 July, 2016. [http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.csu.edu.au/ps/i.do?&id=GALE|A14080896&v=2.1&u=csu\\_au&it=r&p=EAIM&sw=w](http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.csu.edu.au/ps/i.do?&id=GALE|A14080896&v=2.1&u=csu_au&it=r&p=EAIM&sw=w)

<sup>106</sup> Anne Mochon. *Gabriele Münter: Between Munich and Murnau* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Fog Art Museum, 1980), 18.

<sup>107</sup> Annegret Hoberg, and Helmut Friedel. *Gabriele Münter 1877-1962 Retrospektive* (München: Prestel-Verlag, 1992), 31.

<sup>108</sup> Anne Mochon. *Gabriele Münter: Between Munich and Murnau* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Fog Art Museum, 1980), 19.

<sup>109</sup> Annegret Hoberg, and Helmut Friedel. *Gabriele Münter 1877-1962 Retrospektive* (München: Prestel-Verlag, 1992), 31

*Mme Vernot with Aurelie*, 1906 (Figure 12). As the sitter was known to Münter, she individualised the portrait by creating a background which related specifically to her, in this instance Mme Vernot's housemaid Aurelie in the kitchen. According to Mochon, this background was actually printed over the portrait.<sup>110</sup>

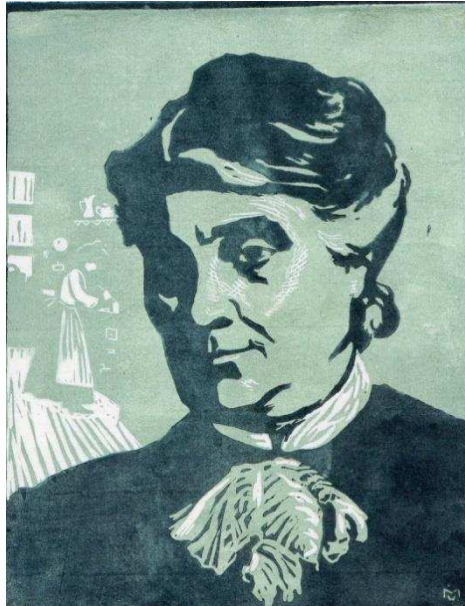


Figure 12. Gabriele Münter, *Mme Vernot with Aurelie*, 1906

Reinhold Heller claims that Münter completed over twenty prints, reflections of the world around her, while she was in Paris, all “absolutely distinct” from Kandinsky’s ‘fantasies’.<sup>111</sup> According to Heller, these portraits were Münter’s “first major independent efforts in portraiture” and she “entered the realm of professional artists” when she exhibited these prints in the Paris Salon des Indépendants in 1907.<sup>112</sup>

Mochon also writes similar praise: “Her major achievement during that year focused on making independent decisions as a graphic artist in portrait and landscape.”<sup>113</sup>

Münter was enlightened by the happenings of the Paris artworld which opened her eyes to other ways of expressing herself. While she made significant progress with her graphic art, her painting had not changed from the late Impressionist style of their years of travelling, so she and Kandinsky decided to return to Munich.

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<sup>110</sup> Anne Mochon. *Gabriele Münter: Between Munich and Murnau* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Fog Art Museum, 1980), 19.

<sup>111</sup> Reinhold Heller. *Gabriele Münter: The Years of Expressionism 1903-1920* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1997), 65.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, 66.

<sup>113</sup> Anne Mochon. *Gabriele Münter: Between Munich and Murnau* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Fog Art Museum, 1980), 18.

Leaving Paris in 1907 on her way to Munich, Münter stayed in Berlin for a short time and attended classes to practice painting and drawing from life. During this time, she conceived the idea for a graphic series of six lino prints titled “Playthings”. This series, of her own creative development, consisted of caricatures in vignette form of children’s toys and playthings. The caricatures while being humorous also contain personal and cultural references. In No. 2 of the series *Uncle Sam and Company*, 1908 (Figure 13) Mochon postulates the figures of Uncle Sam, a teddy bear, and a Prussian toy soldier could be a comic depiction of the USA and Germany.<sup>114</sup>

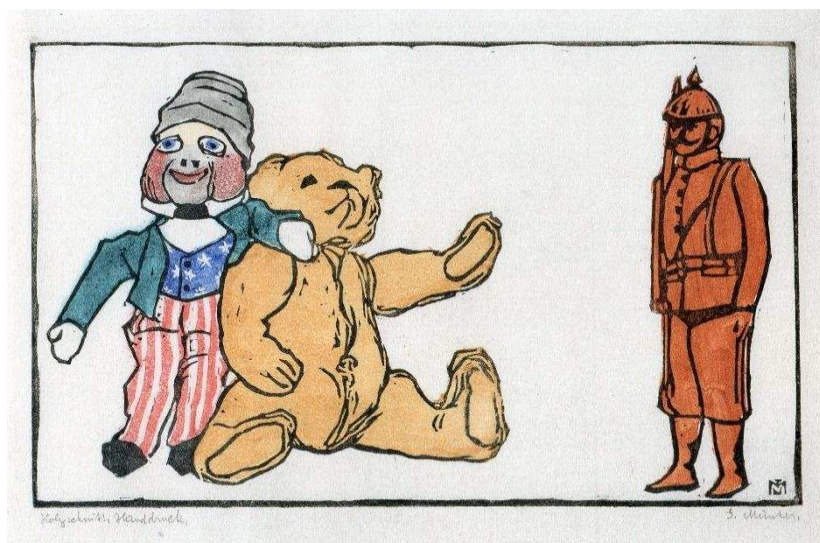


Figure 13. Gabriele Münter, *Uncle Sam and Company*, 1908

This series was the beginning of her representation of miniature objects, as when she returned to Munich and Murnau she began collecting folk art figurines which featured prominently in her future still-lives.

## “A Major Leap”

According to Mochon “Gabriele Münter’s years of formal training with Kandinsky, in Paris and Berlin studios, came to a close at this point; her development as a mature artist was to begin in Murnau in 1908”.<sup>115</sup> Upon her return from Paris and Berlin in 1908, Münter was confident with the skills she had attained, and the small Bavarian town of Murnau provided her with boundless motifs. It was in August 1908 while in

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 22.



Murnau, Münter made a great discovery: “After a brief time of experimentation, I took a major leap there – from painting after nature, more or less impressionistically, to the feel of a content to abstracting to the presentation of an extract.”<sup>116</sup> This ‘presentation of an extract’ was the simplification of form – a synthesis - which had been explained to her by fellow artist Alexej Jawlensky who was acquainted with contemporary French art, and introduced Münter to the “process of eliminating ‘anecdote’, reducing form and colour, to simple shapes bound by lines.”<sup>117</sup> The change in Münter’s painting technique was immediately noticeable from the thickly applied paint by palette knife, to urgent brushstrokes with thinner paint, as seen in *View of the Murnau Moors*, 1908 (Figure 14) which is painted directly on unprimed strawboard. Münter sketched the basic outlines in black paint before filling with purple, green, and blue paint, leaving parts of the board underneath showing through.<sup>118</sup>

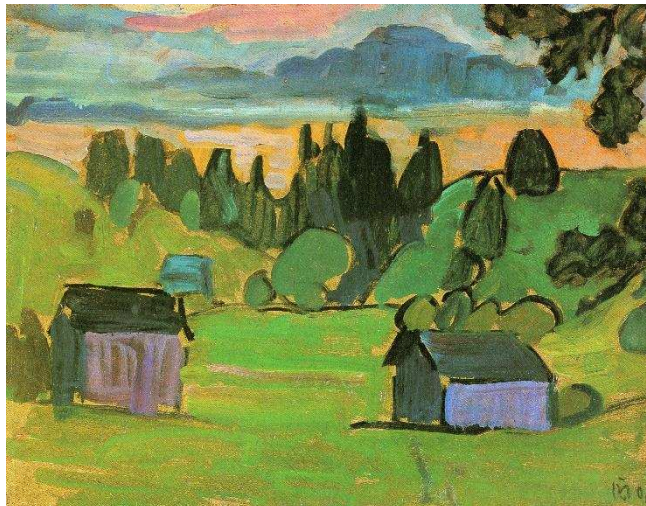


Figure 14. Gabriele Münter, *View of the Murnau Moors*, 1908

Münter captured the essence of self-expression in this painting, the first of many to become known as Expressionism. Münter noted in her diary “I did a whole heap of studies. There were days when I painted 5 studies (on 33 x 41 [cm] sheets of cardboard) and many when I managed 3 and a few when I didn’t paint at all.”<sup>119</sup> This

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<sup>116</sup> Reinhold Heller. *Gabriele Münter: The Years of Expressionism 1903-1920* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1997), 16.

<sup>117</sup> Kain, Evelyn M. “Review”. *Woman’s Art Journal* 28:2 (2007): 59-61. Accessed 16 December, 2015. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20358135>.

<sup>118</sup> Annegret Hoberg, and Shulamith Behr, Barnaby Wright. *Gabriele Münter: The Search for Expression 1906-1917* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2005), 82.

<sup>119</sup> Annegret Hoberg. *Wassily Kandinsky and Gabriele Münter: Letters and Reminiscences 1902-1914*, trans. Ian Robson (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1994), 46.

was a joyful time in her life, having made a breakthrough in her technique, and in the company of her friends and fellow artists, Jawlensky and von Werefkin, and Kandinsky, she was motivated to continue experimenting.

Münter spent her time in Murnau sketching, photographing and painting the landscapes, village streets, and the inhabitants, but it was the local Bavarian folk art of *Hinterglasmalerei* [reverse glass painting] which captivated her. This style of painting, with its black contour lines and block of colours, gave Münter the impetus to experiment with this process. It was *Hinterglasmalerei* that showed Münter how to simplify forms. She had discovered a style, which she developed into her own, quite unlike any other member of the *Blaue Reiter* group. Münter had irrefutably become a *Künstlerin* [Female Artist].

## 4. Folk Art

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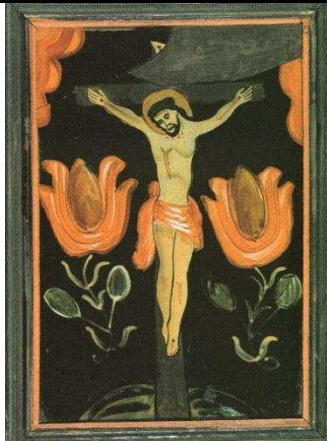


Figure 15. *Christus am Kreuz*, early 19th century

*“Above all it was folk art that showed me the way, namely the once flourishing, rustic reverse-glass painting of the Staffelsee region, with its carefree simplification of forms and the strong colors with dark contours.”*

*Gabriele Münter, 1948<sup>120</sup>*

### ***Hinterglasmalerei***

This is how Gabriele Münter described the Bavarian folk art of *Hinterglasmalerei* [Reverse Glass Painting], which was fundamental in her quest to establish her own style.<sup>121</sup> *Hinterglasmalerei* (figure 15) had been popular in the southern region of Germany for centuries, decorating the walls of homes with their religious themes. The technique of this style of painting was passed down through generations of local families. In Murnau, the master painter Heinrich Rambold (1872-1953), was taught by Josef Gege (1860-1919), himself a third-generation artisan, who wanted to pass on the technique so that it would not ‘die out’.<sup>122</sup>

In *Hinterglasmalerei*, the glass pane is both the image carrier and the protective layer. The traditional method of construction begins with a template of the desired image placed underneath the glass, and then traced onto the surface of the glass with fine lines. The image itself must be constructed in reverse – the opposite of painting on

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<sup>120</sup> Bibiana K. Obler. *Intimate Collaborations: Kandinsky & Münter, Arp & Taeuber*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 36.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>122</sup> Nina Gockerell. *Das Münter-Haus, Hinterglasmalerei, Schnitzereien und Holzspielzeug*, (München: Prestel-Verlag, 2000), 8, 9.

canvas or board – and the method of applying the paint must also be reversed. For example, when painting on canvas, the artist fills the background, then foreground, subject, and finally the small details such as the white dot in the eye. With *Hinterglasmalerei*, the fine details need to be painted first, then the outlines and accent details such as drapery lines, then each block of colour, and finally the background. The artist must take extreme care to get the initial details correct, as there can be no scraping away and painting over.<sup>123</sup> Art historian Reinhold Heller suggests that drawing was an important factor in this technique, a skill which Münter had in abundance. She could relate to the structure of the reverse painting, as she would ‘draw’ her own paintings with a black brush before filling in the colours.<sup>124</sup>

Modernist avant-garde artists were interested in the ‘primitive’. The French modernists were intrigued by African art and culture, and the *Blaue Reiter* [Blue Rider] artists were fascinated with folk art, in particular *Hinterglasmalerei*. Helena Waddy Lepovitz, author of *Images of Faith*, writes that fellow Blue Rider member, Alexej Jawlensky introduced Münter to Heinrich Rambold, a master in glass painting, who was situated in Murnau.<sup>125</sup> Münter described her reaction at seeing Rambold at work:

At Rambold’s I saw . . . how it was done - & I was the first in Murnau – & as far as I know the first in the whole group to get panes of glass & do something too. First copies – then various things of my own . . . I was entranced by the technique and how well things went & was always telling K. about it - until he started himself & then did a lot of glass paintings . . . They tell me I did some good ones of my own.<sup>126</sup>

Münter further explains that other members of the Blue Rider group had also tried the technique of reverse glass painting. Heinrich Campendonk (1889- 1957) integrated tinfoil, gold and silver leaf paper into his paintings, Franz Marc (1880- 1916) did several paintings, and Henri Rousseau (1844-1910) completed a head-only self-portrait, which Münter believes he gave to Kandinsky.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Ingrid Mössinger, and Thomas Friedrich, ed., *Gabriele Munter, Werke im Museum Gunzenhauser*, (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2008), 165.

<sup>124</sup> Reinhold Heller. *Gabriele Münter: The Years of Expressionism 1903-1920* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1997), 115, 118.

<sup>125</sup> Helena Waddy Lepovitz. *Images of Faith: Expressionism, Catholic Folk Art, and the Industrial Revolution* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 5.

<sup>126</sup> Annegret Hoberg. *Wassily Kandinsky and Gabriele Münter: Letters and Reminiscences 1902-1914*, trans. Ian Robson (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1994), 51, 52.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

In 1908 Münter was introduced, by Rambold, to the Brewer Johann Krotz who had been collecting *Hinterglasmalerei* since 1889. His collection consisted of over one thousand Bavarian, Swabian and Bohemian glass paintings which were publicly accessible at that time. The collection is now housed in the Heimatmuseum of Oberammergau, Bavaria.<sup>128</sup> According to author Bibiana Obler, the existence of this collection proves that *Hinterglasmalerei* was taken seriously as an artform and therefore worth preserving.<sup>129</sup> Encouraged by the collections of Rambold and Krotz, Münter started collecting *Hinterglasmalerei*, initially from Murnau, and then, through a dealer in Munich, so that she could gather a variety of different styles, from different regions.<sup>130</sup>

After seeing the process involved in painting on glass from Rambold, Münter experimented, on her own, until she mastered the technique. She began by copying original paintings from the nineteenth century, as well as paintings from Rambold, and with a little practise, she soon discovered her own method.<sup>131</sup> When copying Rambold's votive painting *Kranker im Bett mit den Gnadenbild "Christus in der Rast"* (Figure 16) she made an unintentional error when she traced the copied image (see Figure 17). For the copy to present as a facsimile of the original, the copied image needed to be traced in reverse.

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<sup>128</sup> Reinhold Heller. *Gabriele Münter: The Years of Expressionism 1903-1920* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1997), 115.

<sup>129</sup> Bibiana K, Obler. *Intimate Collaborations: Kandinsky & Münter, Arp & Taeuber*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 36.

<sup>130</sup> Nina Gockerell. *Das Münter -Haus, Hinterglasbilder, Schnitzereien und Holzspielzeug*, (München: Prestel- Verlag, 2000), 20.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

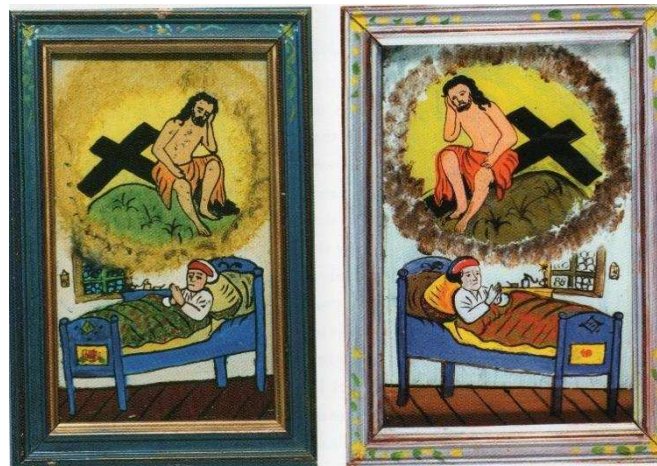


Figure 16. (L) Heinrich Rambold, *Kranker im Bett mit den Gnadenbild "Christus in der Rast"*  
 Figure 17. (R) Gabriele Münter, *Copy of Rambold Votive Painting, 1908-9*

However, once Münter felt comfortable with the technique, she changed direction and began to use her own motifs, independent of religious themes. Her portrait of *Braumeister Schöttl*, 1910, (Figure 18) contains all the stylistic elements of the traditional technique, presented in a modernistic way.<sup>132</sup>



Figure 18. Gabriele Münter, *Braumeister Schöttl vom Angerbräu Murnau*, 1910

In the years 1909-1910 Münter used this technique to create uniquely colourful landscape paintings, such as *Dorfstrasse im Winter*, 1909 (Figure 19).<sup>133</sup>

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 29, 30.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 29, 30.

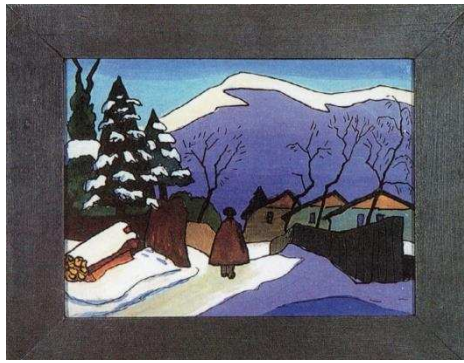


Figure 19. Gabriele Münter, *Dorfstrasse im Winter*, 1909

Münter used the technique of *Hinterglasmalerei* to assist her in simplifying form and colour, bound by black outlines, in her artworks. Elements of this style of painting can be recognised in all the mediums which she used - wood and lino-cut prints, lithographs, and even paper collages. Münter appreciated this gentle form of folk art, and how it contributed to her development as an artist.

## From Low to High Art

Kandinsky and the other male artists of the Blue Rider however, grabbed the opportunity to use this unique form of primitivism to create their own artworks which could be classified as 'high' art. Kandinsky and Marc theorised about *Hinterglasmalerei* in their tome, *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, which included reproductions of eleven examples of Krotz's *Hinterglasbilder*.<sup>134</sup> Author, and translator of the Almanac, Klaus Lankheit, suggests that "their publication introduced peasant glass painting into the history of art".<sup>135</sup> By raising the status of this form of folk art to 'high' art, Kandinsky and Marc were indifferent about exhibiting them; after all, they were men and whatever art they produced was considered to be rational and purposeful, whereas Münter knew that if she exhibited her works, they would be classified as low art, because of her gender. Perhaps this is the reason why, in her lifetime, she never exhibited any of her glass paintings.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Klaus, Lankheit, ed., *The Blaue Reiter Almanac* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), 40.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>136</sup> Bibiana K, Obler. *Intimate Collaborations: Kandinsky & Münter, Arp & Taeluber*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 26.

“An Exhibition of Unknown Work by Gabriele Münter 1877-1962”, was how the catalogue explained the exhibition titled *HINTERGLASMALEREI (Painting on Glass)* held December 1966 to January 1967 at the Leonard Hutton Galleries of New York. The exhibition also included coloured wood-cut prints, etchings and collages. Leonard Hutton Hutschnecker writes in his introduction: “And now that the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York is showing Kandinsky’s “Painting on glass” in order to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the master, I thought it to be a good idea to exhibit Gabriele Münter’s *Hinterglasbilder* simultaneously.”<sup>137</sup> No doubt, Hutschnecker thought he was complimenting Münter’s paintings with this critical remark. He did however, continue on a positive note, explaining that the exhibition was an opportunity to showcase Münter’s “versality” with sixty prints, mostly coloured wood-cuts, twelve etchings, six lithographs, and six collages accompanying her *Hinterglasbilder* [Reverse glass pictures]. Hutschnecker also included some eighteenth and nineteenth century Bavarian *Hinterglasbilder* as contextual examples for Münter’s own paintings.<sup>138</sup>

Gabriele Münter was a true Expressionist, conveying her inner thoughts and feelings onto her chosen medium. Folk art, and in particular, *Hinterglasmalerei*, assisted Münter in her quest to simplify figures and other forms in nature. She realised by using strong colours outlined in black contour, and omitting unnecessary detail, she had achieved ‘significant form’, which according to the critic, Clive Bell, was the necessary quality in all worthwhile works of visual art.<sup>139</sup> My research has revealed that *Hinterglasmalerei* had a three-fold effect on Münter. Firstly, she copied from antique originals to master the technique, then progressed from using religious motifs to her own themes. In doing this, she not only created something unique, but she surpassed any academic genre available. Münter created her *own* genre. Secondly, Münter used the elements she had learnt from *Hinterglasmalerei*, such as bold black outlines, simplified shapes and strong colours, and applied these elements to her oil paintings. This breakthrough was a style of her own innovation. And thirdly, her

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<sup>137</sup> Leonard Hutton Hutschnecker, introduction to *Hinterglasmalerei (Painting on Glass)* Exhibition catalogue, December 1966 to January 1967 at the Leonard Hutton Galleries, New York.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Alfred Werner, artist’s essay in *Hinterglasmalerei (Painting on Glass)* Exhibition catalogue, December 1966 to January 1967 at the Leonard Hutton Galleries, New York.



completed *Hinterglasbilder*, and those glass paintings in her folk-art collection, became objects in her still life paintings. This is a clear indication of rational thinking, and rather than theorising about the primitivism of *Hinterglasmalerei*, as her male contemporaries did, Münter used the technique to develop, and expand, her oeuvre; an oeuvre which has misguidedly been overlooked.

## 5. Nobody's Apprentice

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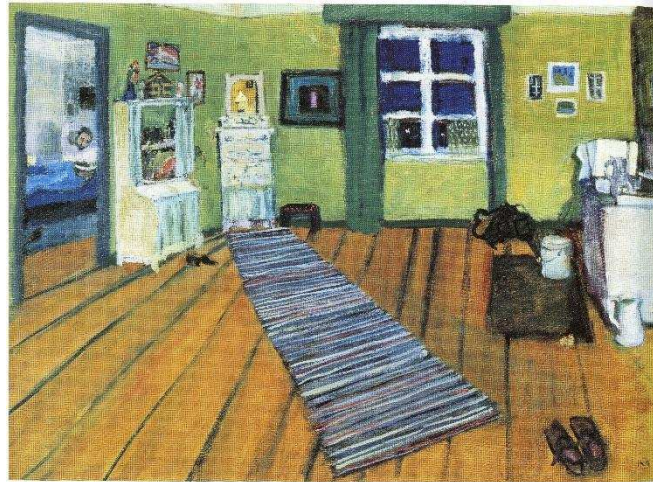


Figure 20. Gabriele Münter, *Interior (Still Life, Bedroom)*, 1909

“If I was to have a formal role model – and this was certainly the case between 1908-13; then it would be van Gogh, whose theories Jawlensky conveyed to me.”  
(Note by Gabriele Münter, 1930)

Even though Münter was a member of the Blue Rider group, she preferred to develop her creativity independently. Contemporary art historians refer to Münter as *Künstlerin* [Female artist] and *Expressionistin* [Female Expressionist], terms of respect used to describe Münter and her unique style. In this chapter I will argue that while Münter may have been influenced by contemporary French art, she was not aligned with *any* group or movement.

According to Benjamin Forgey, Münter visited various exhibitions in Paris in 1907 and was influenced by Matisse and “other Parisian color revolutionaries” and suggests that Münter’s work can be compared to the French Fauves and Gauguin more than the “abstract or expressive extremes of German Expressionism”.<sup>140</sup> Jawlensky was also acquainted with contemporary French art and introduced Münter to the “process of eliminating ‘anecdote’, reducing form and colour, to simple shapes bound by lines.”

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<sup>140</sup> Forgey, Benjamin. “From Gabriele Münter, Her Own Wry Expressionism”. *The Washington Post*, 2 August, 1998, G01. Accessed 6 July, 2016. URL: <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.csu.edu.au/docview/408393207?accountid=10344>.

Jawlensky called this “synthesis”.<sup>141</sup> In the Preface of the exhibition catalogue for *Gabriele Münter, Murnau to Stockholm (1908-1917)* held at the Leonard Hutton Galleries, New York 1960-61, Dr Hans Röthel, writes that Münter was influenced by Rousseau and the Fauves (Rousseau for his naivety, and the Fauves for their simple forms and bold colours). Röthel emphatically states that fellow member of the Blue Rider, Alexej Jawlensky’s approach “had much in common with Münter’s. But it was Jawlensky who followed in Münter’s footsteps rather than the reverse.”<sup>142</sup>

In 1953 a German critic claimed her artworks to be “that of a typical student of Jawlensky”, to which Münter gave a written response detailing the artistic work relationship between Kandinsky, Jawlensky and herself, and stated “the meetings and the departures, working together and yet expressing your own ideas – all this does not get expressed when my person and my work are mentioned under the catchword ‘Jawlensky-student’”.<sup>143</sup> Obviously Münter took great offence at being referred to as a student of *anyone*, especially at seventy-six years of age.

Despite the claims that Münter was influenced by various modernist artists, as well as being a student of Kandinsky and Jawlensky, she identified her source of inspiration in a written note: “If I was to have a formal role model – and this was certainly the case between 1908-13; then it would be van Gogh, whose theories Jawlensky conveyed to me.”<sup>144</sup> Elements of van Gogh can be seen in Münter’s *Interior (Still Life, Bedroom)*, 1909 (Figure 20) – the colours, image of a bed, timber floor, and simple furnishings. This painting depicts Münter’s bedroom in the house at Murnau, which she bought in 1909. The house was to be a refuge from the hectic city life of Munich and the activity of organising exhibitions, a place where they could live in harmony. The nature of the interior scene in this painting is very personal, and according to Münter scholar Reinhold Heller, the

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<sup>141</sup> Kain, Evelyn M. “Review”. *Woman’s Art Journal* 28:2 (2007): 59-61. Accessed 16 December, 2015. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20358135>.

<sup>142</sup> Hans K. Roethel. Preface of the exhibition catalogue for *Gabriele Münter, Murnau to Stockholm (1908-1917)* held at the Leonard Hutton Galleries, New York 1960-61.

<sup>143</sup> Norma Broude, and Mary D. Garrard, ed. *Feminism and Art History, Questioning the Litany* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 287.

<sup>144</sup> Annegret Hoberg, *Wassily Kandinsky and Gabriele Münter: Letters and Reminiscences 1902-1914*, trans. Ian Robson (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1994), 52.

painting was never exhibited by Münter.<sup>145</sup> While Heller states the painting is intended to show the harmony with the household, I believe the painting is a comment on their relationship. Münter has painted this scene from her own viewpoint (at the easel); the viewer sees what she saw. Kandinsky can be seen in the distance through an open door, reclining on a bed reading a book. There is a huge expanse of timber floor, accentuated by the width of each board, between Münter and Kandinsky. This distance between them, as depicted by the painting, is also a reference to the distance between them in their relationship. The one thing which could bring them together, in the painting, is the long runner rug, which Münter *could* have painted from her viewpoint directing towards the door where Kandinsky lay beyond, acting as bridge to connect the two. However, the rug is directed away from Kandinsky towards the corner of the room. A comment on living together, and being together, but not – Münter felt isolated within the relationship, and this was her way of communicating it.

## From Independence to Isolation

Münter's work from 1908 onwards show a unique independent style. She was naturally in-tune with her surroundings, whether that be indoors or outdoors. In her interview with Roditi in 1958, Münter claimed

My main difficulty was that I could not paint fast enough. My pictures are all moments of my life, I mean instantaneous visual experiences, generally noted very rapidly and spontaneously. . . it was Kandinsky who . . . taught me to work fast enough, and with enough self-assurance, to be able to achieve this kind of rapid and spontaneous recording of moments of life. . . After that, I worked more and more on my own.<sup>146</sup>

Münter did learn from Kandinsky, but these lessons did not define her artistic character. She was nobody's apprentice.

Münter presents in her paintings a different reality from her male contemporaries. Her vision and focus are defined through her gender, and the limitations imposed on

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<sup>145</sup> Reinhold Heller. *Gabriele Münter: The Years of Expressionism 1903-1920* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1997), 108.

<sup>146</sup> Edouard Roditi, *Dialogues on Art* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1960), 148, 149.

women, resonant in the subject matter.<sup>147</sup> At the end of 1908 Münter produced portraits and still life paintings which focussed on the people and objects in her environs, which was limited by her social background, profession, gender and marital status. Before meeting Kandinsky, she enjoyed plays, operas, balls, and artists' festivals, but as Kandinsky disapproved of these pleasures, she no longer partook of them. She had no social contact outside her small circle of artistic friends, as her 'immoral' relationship with Kandinsky compromised her respectability and suitability to be received in people's homes, yet Kandinsky did not suffer the same fate.<sup>148</sup> Her world became increasingly introverted, and her social anxieties of gender imbalance were reflected in her portrait paintings of interior scenes.

While Kandinsky 'held court' with his artistic friends at the Murnau house, discussing and theorising, Münter would sit quietly, observing those present, and rapidly sketch the scene before her. These sketches she would use as the basis for a painting. These paintings not only reflected the conflicts and negotiations of her circle of friends, but they also documented the bohemian lifestyle and gender imbalance. An example is Münter's portrait *Listening*, 1909 (Figure 21) a painting of Jawlensky sitting in the *Essecke* [corner dining booth] listening to Kandinsky and Klee theorize. Münter commented:

All three of them were forever discussing art, and at first everybody had their own views and their own style. Jawlensky was less intellectual or intelligent than Kandinsky or Klee, and he was often confused by their theories. On one occasion, I painted a portrait which I called *Listening*. It shows Jawlensky with an expression of puzzlement on his chubby face, listening to Kandinsky's new artistic theories ... Like many great artists of the Paris School, he was no theoretician, but a really great craftsman and artist.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Reinhold Heller. *Gabriele Münter: The Years of Expressionism 1903-1920* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1997), 98.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid*, 83.

<sup>149</sup> Dietmar Elger, *Expressionism: A Revolution in German Art* (Köln: Benedikt Taschen Verlag, 1991), 174-176.

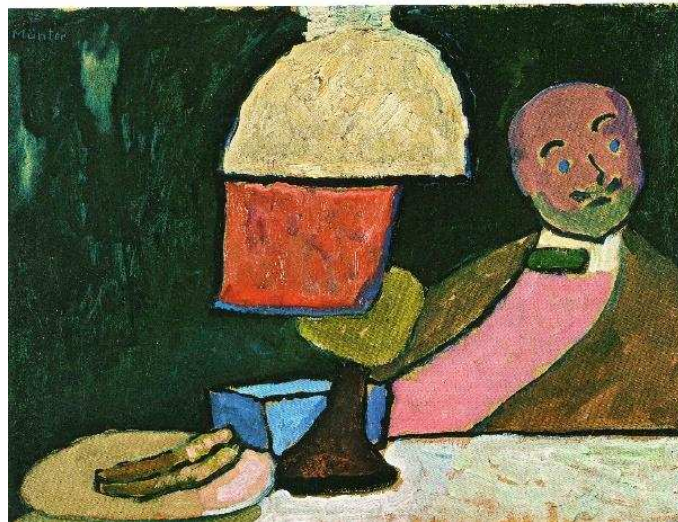


Figure 21. Gabriele Münter, *Listening (Portrait of Jawlensky)*, 1909

In this portrait Münter has captured, not a likeness of Jawlensky, but the action of ‘astonished’ listening. These caricature-like portrait paintings of men include a comedic, or mocking undertone, yet Münter develops an empathetic approach when portraying women.<sup>150</sup>



Figure 22. Gabriele Münter, *After Tea II*, 1912.

In May 1912, art dealer Hans Goltz and his wife visited the apartment in Munich, which Münter and Kandinsky shared. At the time of this visit Münter’s life was in turmoil as her relationship with Kandinsky had reached a crisis point. This visit became the subject for a picture, and Münter completed eight large-format drawings and two oil

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<sup>150</sup> Reinhold Heller. *Gabriele Münter: The Years of Expressionism 1903-1920* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1997), 122.

studies before completing the final painting *After Tea II*, 1912 (Figure 22). According to art historian Annegret Hoberg, Münter seemed to have difficulty with the composition, altering her own figure several times in the drawings, yet the two men remain in the same position in animated conversation.<sup>151</sup> The final painting, *After Tea II*, portrays Münter isolated and withdrawn, while Kandinsky and Goltz are on the opposite side of the room, relaxed and at ease. Reinhold Heller states that “Münter’s drawings for *After Tea* are preoccupied with finding pictorial expression for this personal alienation”, while simultaneously showing “a social division of men and women into their separate groups”. Not only a social division, but a psychological division, as the men are portrayed in conversation while the women are silent.<sup>152</sup> Münter reveals her own alienation within her relationship with Kandinsky, and at the same time, the gender disparity which was evident in society at that time.

## Relationship Issues

Kandinsky realised from an early stage in their relationship, that Münter had her own goals and style of expression but he still used his ‘teacher’ status to critique and coach her. Münter on the other hand, thought Kandinsky’s work wonderful, but she also began to criticise it. This led to problems within their relationship, the dynamics of which changed as Kandinsky travelled extensively and spent more time away from Münter.<sup>153</sup> Gerhard Danzer believes that Kandinsky needed this type of distant/close relationship to allow him to retain his freedom, while keeping Münter close and faithful through daily correspondence.<sup>154</sup> Benjamin Forgey suggests that both Münter and Kandinsky did not seem to realize that “emotional dependence is far different from artistic indebtedness” and that Kandinsky “seems to have viewed her as the eternal female apprentice, operating on a lower level.”<sup>155</sup> As Kandinsky was quite

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<sup>151</sup> Annegret Hoberg, and Shulamith Behr, Barnaby Wright. *Gabriele Münter: The Search for Expression 1906-1917* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2005), 35.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>153</sup> Gisela Kleine. *Gabriele Münter und Wassily Kandinsky: Biographie eines Paares* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1992), 187.

<sup>154</sup> Gerhard Danzer. *Europa, deine Frauen: Beiträge zu einer weiblichen Kulturgeschichte* (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2015), 123.

<sup>155</sup> Benjamin Forgey, “From Gabriele Münter, Her Own Wry Expressionism,” *The Washington Post*, 2 August, 1998, G01, accessed 6 July, 2016. URL: <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.csu.edu.au/docview/408393207?accountid=10344>.

controlling in their relationship, Münter may have accepted this judgement to keep the peace.<sup>156</sup>

In 1911 Münter was feeling increasingly alienated in her relationship with Kandinsky. While he was away she took the opportunity to reflect, and began writing, in diary form, a brief synopsis of her life with Kandinsky since 1905.<sup>157</sup> This profile became part of a larger project which Münter initiated in March 1925. After four years of hostile communications with Kandinsky, through lawyers, regarding a division of property, Münter began writing an extensive manuscript titled “Confession and Accusation”. Reinhold Heller explains that this project included a combination of “diary entries, drafts of letters, notes, reminiscences and personal reflections concerning her relationship with Kandinsky” as well as quotations from folk songs, poems and books.<sup>158</sup> It was a heart wrenching, yet cathartic experience for Münter to condense her relationship with Kandinsky to a few lines: “I allowed myself to be lied to and cheated out of my life . . . And now I think that even what I gained from him as an artist was only half – only a small quarter – nothing complete, no totality.”<sup>159</sup> Münter suffered greatly during, and after, her relationship with Kandinsky, yet she continued to create beautiful art, not tormented or vindictive.

Despite her suffering, Münter was a survivor and her contribution to art history was significant. Her substantial and diverse oeuvre spanning avant-garde art at the beginning of the twentieth century, and two world wars, including the Nazi *Malverbot* [Forbidden to paint] of 1937-1945, yet she remained relatively unknown outside Germany.<sup>160</sup> Art historian, Shulamith Behr, suggests that German women artists “disappeared” from art history texts after 1933.<sup>161</sup> Women artists’ careers were blighted by the impact of the German Third Reich (1933-1945) especially avant-garde

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<sup>156</sup> Benjamin Forgey, “From Gabriele Münter, Her Own Wry Expressionism,” *The Washington Post*, 2 August, 1998, G01, accessed 6 July, 2016. URL: <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.csu.edu.au/docview/408393207?accountid=10344>.

<sup>157</sup> Reinhold Heller. *Gabriele Münter: The Years of Expressionism 1903-1920* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1997), 18.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

<sup>160</sup> Karoline Hille. *Gabriele Münter, Die Künstlerin mit der Zauberhand* (Köln: DuMont, 2012), 9.

<sup>161</sup> Annegret Hoberg, and Shulamith Behr, Barnaby Wright. *Gabriele Münter: The Search for Expression 1906-1917* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2005), 44.



women expressionists, including Münter, as their art was associated with *Entartete Kunst* [Degenerate Art].<sup>162</sup> Author and curator, Stephanie Barron claims that “The National Socialists rejected and censured virtually everything that had existed on the German modern art scene prior to 1933”. The artists targeted were those whose works identified with Cubism, Expressionism, Surrealism, and any other modern style, - abstract or representational – all were considered ‘degenerate’.<sup>163</sup> This Nazi invasion of art culture meant that exhibitions were limited, however Münter did exhibit two paintings in the Nazi travelling exhibition “*Die Strassen Adolf Hitlers in der Kunst*” [Adolf Hitler’s roads of Art] of 1936. In 1937, she exhibited at the Munich Art Association, where Nazi Bavarian minister of education and culture, Adolf Wagner castigated her works, forcing her into further isolation.<sup>164</sup> Münter protected her oeuvre, and some of Kandinsky’s paintings which she had in her possession, in the basement of her house at Murnau, to keep them safe from Nazi confiscation and allied bombing.<sup>165</sup> When World War Two had ended, Munter exclaimed

*Die Diktatur, die mich seit 1937 zwingt, mein künstlerisches Dasein zu verbergen, und der Krieg vollendeten meine Zurückgezogenheit, ohne meine Arbeit zu hemmen oder zu verbiegen.*<sup>166</sup>

[The dictatorship that since 1937 forced me to hide my artistic being, and the War which compelled me into seclusion, did not hinder or distort my work.]

Münter fared better, in the post-war period, than most women artists because she managed to protect her oeuvre. Behr claims that when the Munich-based art historians and museum directors discovered Münter’s collection, they recognised “Münter’s importance as one of the few surviving members of the *Blaue Reiter*.”<sup>167</sup> However, this recognition was not always the case for women artists in post-World War Two Germany. Since the 1950s, art historians in their efforts to define the term “Expressionism” focussed on the contribution of male artists, while women artists were marginalised to student, muse, lover or wife, even though there was evidence of

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>163</sup> Stephanie Barron, “*Degenerate Art*”, *The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1991), 9.

<sup>164</sup> Annegret Hoberg, and Shulamith Behr, Barnaby Wright. *Gabriele Münter: The Search for Expression 1906-1917* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2005), 44, 45.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>166</sup> Karoline Hille, *Gabriele Münter, Die Künstlerin mit der Zauberhand* (Köln: DuMont, 2012), 168.

<sup>167</sup> Annegret Hoberg, and Shulamith Behr, Barnaby Wright. *Gabriele Münter: The Search for Expression 1906-1917* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2005), 45.

the word “*Expressionistin*” [Woman Expressionist] in critical and theoretical discourses.<sup>168</sup>

Münter’s artistic oeuvre was interrupted by National Socialism and World War Two, but she continued creating art until her death, yet she was still overlooked by the art historical canon. Shulamith Behr suggests that her philosophies on art were not as known because she was not as theoretical as Kandinsky. While Kandinsky wrote treatises about the spirituality in art, which secured his place in the history of modernism, Münter’s writings were in the form of journals and correspondence.<sup>169</sup> Behr states that any “academic scrutiny of their theoretical implications” was hindered by Münter placing a ban on the publication of these writings for fifty years after her death.<sup>170</sup> In the late 1950s Münter wanted to destroy all the letters which she received from Kandinsky during the years 1902 to 1916, however her friend and confidant, Dr Hans Röthel, who was Director of the Städtische Galerie in Munich at that time, intervened. He offered her a compromise which she accepted: that the letters not be destroyed, and Röthel assured her they would not be shown to anyone, until fifty years after her death.<sup>171</sup> This could be a major factor in the recent renewed interest in Münter, not just her artworks. The availability of her personal and artistic notes would enable contemporary art historians to bring her out of Kandinsky’s shadow and into the light of the twenty-first century.

During her lifetime, Münter had an extraordinary number of exhibitions. Immediately after her death in 1962, the Städtische Galerie in Lenbachhaus, Munich held a memorial exhibition, as did the Dalzell Hatfield Galleries in Los Angeles in 1963.<sup>172</sup> Followed in 1966 by two exhibitions held at the Leonard Hutton Galleries in New York. It was not until 1980 that an exhibition of her works was shown again outside Germany. Since 1980, there have been several major exhibitions in the USA, England, and Europe, all with accompanying catalogues, written with authority by Münter art

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>171</sup> Hans K. Roethel, and Jean K. Benjamin, *Kandinsky, Catalogue Raisonné of the Oil-Paintings, Volume One, 1900-1915* (London: Sotheby Publications, 1982), 20.

<sup>172</sup> Annegret Hoberg, and Helmut Friedel, *Gabriele Münter 1877-1962 Retrospektive* (München: Prestel-Verlag, 1992), 297.

historians and scholars, to enlighten and educate the viewing public. Münter is a well-known and well-loved artist in the country of her birth, Germany. The Städtische Galerie in Lenbachhaus holds Münter in high esteem not only for the great artist she is, but also for her generous gift, in 1957, of her own artworks, and some from fellow artists of the Blue Rider, which thanks to Münter, survived World War Two. It seems only logical that the Städtische Galerie in Lenbachhaus should hold an exhibition to celebrate the one hundred and fortieth anniversary of Münter's birthday, and the sixtieth anniversary of her donation of artworks to the Galerie in 1957. This exhibition runs from 31 October, 2017 to 8 April, 2018. On the Städtische Galerie's website, curators Isabelle Jansen and Matthias Mühling, explain the rationale of the exhibition:

With this exhibition of her art at the Lenbachhaus, we seek to offer a broader perspective on Münter's creative output. We will ask questions of art history to highlight its complexity and distinctive qualities and suggest a fuller appreciation of her achievements. Her work as a painter, presented in various thematic sections, will be at the heart of the show: from classic genres such as the portrait and the landscape to interiors, abstractions, and her "primitivist" work, visitors will encounter Münter's oeuvre in all its richness.<sup>173</sup>

After Munich, this exhibition will be travelling to the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk (near Copenhagen) - 3 May to 19 August, 2018, and Museum Ludwig, Cologne - 15 September 2018 to 13 January 2019, allowing greater exposure of her works, to the viewing public, and the artworld in general. Münter was a great artist, not aligned with any group or movement, nor Jawlensky or Kandinsky, she was nobody's apprentice but an artist of her own creation. This latest exhibition at the Städtische Galerie in Lenbachhaus, Munich, is the greatest opportunity to launch Münter into the twenty-first century and beyond – giving her the recognition she finally deserves.

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<sup>173</sup> Städtische Galerie in Lenbachhaus, "Exhibitions". Accessed 3 September 2017. <http://www.lenbachhaus.de/exhibitions/vorschau2017/gabrielemuenter/?L=1>

## Notes on Patriarchy in Art History

“The world of men still thanks her more for the hundred and twenty Kandinskys that she presented to the city museum of Munich than for her own life’s work.”

Germaine Greer, *The Obstacle Race*, 1979.<sup>174</sup>

In Münter’s early career she had to contend with discrimination because she was a woman entering the male dominated artworld. She was called a *Malweib* [painting girl], ridiculed and demoralised by society because she was living with Kandinsky while he was still married to his first wife. The ultimate affront came in 1916 when her letters to Kandinsky were unanswered. When World War One was declared in 1914, Münter and Kandinsky fled to Switzerland and from there Kandinsky returned to his native Russia, and Münter travelled to the safety of Sweden. Münter spent her time organising an exhibition for Kandinsky in Stockholm, hoping that they could be reunited. He did come in 1916 for the exhibition, stayed a few months, and then returned to Russia. Münter never saw him again. Her correspondence to him remained unanswered.

Münter returned to Germany after World War One ended, and it was not until many years later that she discovered he had married a young Russian woman in 1917. While Münter was in Scandinavia, she was admired as an artist involved with a famous international avant-garde group (Blue Rider), but when she returned to Germany she had already lost the status of *Künstlerin* [Women Artist]. In 1922 she wrote to her friend Arthur Segal:

*Mit meiner Kunst geht es mir als alleinstehender Frau auch dreckig – eigentlich geschätzt, verstanden wird mein Talent ebenso wenig wie meine Person, und dass ich zu den Pionieren der neuen Kunst gehört habe, ist längst vergessen. Die mit und hinter mir standen, sind jetzt lauter Berühmtheiten, ich bin aus allem heraus – eine von tausend malenden Frauen, die nirgends dazugehört und nirgends zur Ausstellung kommt.*<sup>175</sup>

[As a woman on her own, my art is seen as dirty. My talent is as little understood as my character, and the fact that I belonged to the pioneers of the new art, is already forgotten. Those that stood with me, and behind me, are famous legends, and I am now an outsider – one of thousands of women painters that don’t belong anywhere and have nowhere to exhibit.]

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<sup>174</sup> Germaine Greer. *The Obstacle Race* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg Limited, 1979), 42.

<sup>175</sup> Karoline Hille. *Gabriele Münter, Die Künstlerin mit der Zauberhand* (Köln: DuMont, 2012), 161.

She soon realised that there was no solidarity amongst her male contemporaries as they were competing against each other. Male artists were forcing women artists into the background as they also considered them to be competition.<sup>176</sup>

In 1933 National Socialism forced her into seclusion and stymied her artistic production, and post-World War Two, art historians relegated her to the position of student, muse, lover and wife, which according to the art historical canon, is where she stayed until the last decade of the twentieth century.

Throughout history, the patriarchal society of the artworld has held the power to decide which artists are worthy of recognition, and the art institutions hold the power to decide who are worthy of representation. The highest honour which could be bestowed on any artist is *representation* to the public. In her lifetime, Münter fought for her right to be accepted, to exhibit, and be recognised in the male-dominated artworld. Yet in the twenty-first century, gender parity within the artworld has still not been achieved, however feminist activist groups are monitoring the galleries and art museums to rectify this gender inequality.

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 161.

# Conclusion

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I initially chose to write about Gabriele Münter because her artworks appealed to me, and I felt an affinity with this woman. My research for this dissertation inspired me to question the art historical canon which privileges male artists, and simply overlooks the achievement of female artists. My writing was motivated by a sense of justice. For me to present Münter in the best possible way, I devised a five-step methodology which guided my writing. My thesis developed while I was working through the five steps and I concluded that Münter was an extraordinary woman. Despite the adversities which crossed her path in life, she remained strong and focussed on her art. She was a survivor. Her story needed to be told. Her story became my story.

Gabriele Münter's parents both died before she reached the age of twenty-one. She received a significant inheritance which allowed her to live a life of freedom, without needing to marry. At the turn of the twentieth century, Münter was a typical 'modern woman' who enjoyed relative freedom in a society resistant to change its moral and civil conventions. The patriarchal hierarchy of society influenced the perception of a women's 'place' in society – at home caring for a husband and family. As Münter did not want to marry, and chose to pursue an artistic career instead, she was ridiculed and discriminated against by the male-dominated artworld. Women were not allowed entry to art academies, compelling them to seek an art education privately, paying fees six times the amount which men paid at the academy. Even after receiving an art education, there was no opportunity for women artists to exhibit. The progress of a woman artist was blocked in every direction by a patriarchal system, yet Münter persevered, seeking an art education and connecting with the avant-garde artists of Munich, in order to exhibit her works.

Gender imbalance was not the only adversity which Münter encountered. Her relationship with Wassily Kandinsky was doomed from the start. He was her teacher before he became her lover, but he never relinquished his role as teacher. He was domineering and selfish, not allowing her to live life as she chose. Her relationship was

seen as immoral by society - Kandinsky did not marry her as he promised to do. He was jealous of her talent and would belittle her ideas, publicly labelling her work as naïve and feminine, so that her art would be categorised as 'low' art, effectively demeaning her artwork. However, Münter reached a stage of maturity, working independently of Kandinsky. There was nothing more for her to learn, so she created her own style, and even her own genre of art. Münter survived the adversity of the ill-fated relationship with Kandinsky, but when World War One ended and she returned to Germany, she was once again faced with discrimination from her contemporary male artists, yet she did not allow this gender inequality to affect her artistic career. However, her artistic production was halted in 1933 by National Socialism. Her art was decreed 'degenerate' by the Nazis and she was forbidden to paint. She withdrew to the seclusion of her house in Murnau to survive World War Two, painting again in the late 1940s.

Despite the myriad of adversities, Münter remained strong and forged ahead on her own, continuing to produce spectacular art, yet she has been overlooked by the art historical canon. My research revealed several reasons for this oversight, the most prominent being: the art historians of the 1950s favouring the achievements of male artists, relegating Münter to the position of student, muse, and lover; and, the fact that Münter was not a theoretical person, documenting her artistic ideas in the form of journals, letters and notes, on which she placed a ban on publishing until fifty years after her death.

My methodology is in line with the current movements in twenty-first century scholarship which seeks to revise the past. The recent revisionist/feminist reading of art history, and the scholarly writing combined with retrospective exhibitions of her works internationally, culminating in the latest exhibition in the Städtische Galerie in Lenbachhaus, Munich (31 October 2017 to 9 April 2018), have extracted Münter from Kandinsky's shadow, and thrust her amazing art into the twenty-first century. Münter is finally getting the recognition which she deserves.

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## Introduction

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## Chapter 1

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