

GABRIELE MÜNTER. The Great Expressionist Woman Painter

12 November 2024 to 9 February 2025

Curators: Marta Ruiz del Árbol, Isabelle Jansen and Mattias Mühling

Gabriele Münter (1877-1962) was one of the founders of The Blue Rider (*Der Blaue Reiter*), the legendary group of Expressionist artists based in Munich which emerged in late 1911, to which Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, among others, also belonged. Münter is well known as an artist in Germany but it is only in recent years that she has started to enjoy greater recognition in the rest of Europe. The Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, which has four of her paintings in its collections, is now organising the first retrospective on the artist in Spain, thus continuing its project of researching and highlighting the work of so many great women artists and the place they deserve in the history of art.

Through 145 paintings, drawings, prints and photographs the exhibition aims to present not only Gabriele Münter's artistic activities and the rich complexity of her work, but also an artist who rebelled against the limitations imposed on women of her day and who became one of the outstanding figures of German Expressionism at the start of the 20th century. Throughout her extensive career, on numerous occasions Münter demonstrated an ability to adapt, a tireless desire for experimentation and an openness to what was new or different. In her paintings, with their precise lines and intense colours, she immerses the viewer in her private world and through her highly perceptive gaze presents lovers, everyday objects, landscapes and herself, all refined to their essence.

The exhibition is the result of a collaborative project between the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, the Gabriele Münter and Johannes Eichner Foundation and the Städtische Galerie am Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau in Munich. It benefits from the support of the Comunidad de Madrid and the Art Foundation Mentor Lucerne. After its showing in Madrid the exhibition will be seen at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris.

Images, from left to right: *Portrait of Marianne von Werefkin*, 1909, and *Village Street in Winter* 1911, both in the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau München, donated by Gabriele Münter, 1957; *Still Life on the Tram (After Shopping)*, 1909-1912.

The Gabriele Münter and Johannes Eichner Foundation, Munich

More information: Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza. Press Office.

Paseo del Prado, 8. 28014 Madrid. Tel. +34 913600236 / +34 914203944.

prensa@museothyssen.org

<https://www.museothyssen.org/en/private-area/press/dossiers/gabriele-munter>



**THYSSEN-
BORNEMISZA**
MUSEO NACIONAL

With the collaboration of



With the support of

**ART FOUNDATION
MENTOR LUCERNE**

The exhibition opens with a section in which the artist presents herself to the public through a series of self-portraits and photographs, then continues along a thematic-chronological route which covers Münter's entire, lengthy career. An extensive initial chapter is devoted to her beginnings as an amateur photographer, analysing how her relationship with this modern mode of expression, less codified than traditional fine arts, was fundamental for her later development. Her activity as a painter is then presented through a journey that starts with the works created on her travels around Europe and North Africa with her partner Wassily Kandinsky, and continues in a large space dedicated to her masterpieces from the Blue Rider period. Finally, the exhibition focuses on Münter's exile in Scandinavia during World War I and the different paths of expression she encountered following her return to Germany in the 1920s.



Boating, 1910. Oil on canvas.
125,1 x 73,66 cm. Milwaukee Art
Museum, Milwaukee, donated by
Mrs. Harry Lynde Bradley

1. Reflections and shadows:



Little Girl Standing at the Side of a Street, Saint Louis, Missouri, 1900. The Gabriele Münter and Johannes Eichner Foundation, Munich

The first room of the exhibition is devoted to the self-portraits which Münter created throughout her career, but particularly between 1908 and 1914, the years when she was one of the key figures in the rise of Expressionism in Munich. Also included are a number of photographs in which the shadow of the artist appears projected in the image, a resource that functioned to include her figure in the composition and which she sometimes employed in her paintings, as in *Boating* (1910) and *The Birds' Breakfast* (1934), in both of which the painter is represented from behind in the foreground.

2. Beginnings in black and white:

Between 1898 and 1900 Gabriele Münter visited the United States, a country where her parents, emigrants who had returned to Germany during the Civil War, had met and married and which she was now visiting for the first time. During those two years she lived with her maternal relatives in various places, becoming familiar with the reality of American society at first hand and recording everything that caught her attention in her sketchbooks. After being gifted one of the new Kodak portable cameras in 1899, photography made a decisive contribution to Münter's activities as a draughtsman and she experimented with the creative possibilities of the new medium.



Three Women in Their Sunday Best, Marshall, Texas, 19 June 1900. The
Gabriele Münter and Johannes
Eichner Foundation, Munich

The exhibition brings together a selection of 20 photographs of the more than 400 which Münter took during that decisive trip, images highly valued both for their artistic quality and their importance for her creative development. For the first time in these photographs she explores themes such as landscape, urban views, domestic interiors and the world of work, which would later become the subjects of her paintings. Her interest in capturing moments and the concept of working in series are other aspects that would subsequently emerge in her paintings, as well as her simple and

analytical way of looking, capable of structuring space through a few lines, which is one of the principal characteristics of her pictorial compositions.

3. Outdoors:



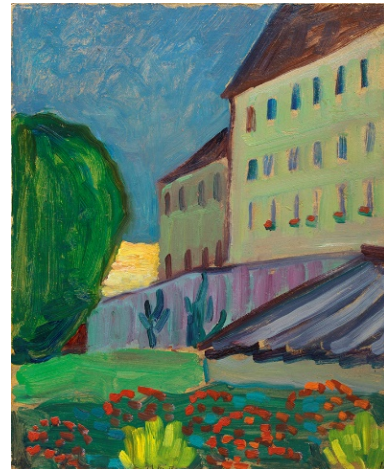
Lane in Tunis, 1905. Canvas, 16,3 × 24,5 cm. The Gabriele Münter and Johannes Eichner Foundation, Munich

After her return to Germany in 1901 Münter embarked on her artistic training in Munich. The following year this would take her to the Phalanx art school of which Kandinsky was a founder and teacher. Its painting classes proved crucial for Münter's decision to opt for painting rather than sculpture, which had initially attracted her. Between 1902 and 1903 she took part in the painting trips organised by Kandinsky in rural areas of Bavaria where she produced her first oil paintings. Subsequently, between 1904 and 1908, the two travelled around Europe and North Africa together

and moved to Paris for a year, where they had the opportunity to see the work of Gauguin, Van Gogh and the Fauves, led by Matisse. During these trips Münter pursued her interest in photography and painted outdoors, often recording the same image with her camera and brushes. These paintings are stylistically linked to late Impressionism, revealing a greater interest in volume than in the study of atmospheric effects.

4. The discovery of Murnau:

After returning to Munich in the summer of 1908 Münter visited the Bavarian town of Murnau in the foothills of the Alps, again with Kandinsky and in the company of the artists and couple Alexej von Jawlensky and Marianne von Werefkin. Their close collaboration resulted in works considered foundational for South German Expressionism: "It was a wonderful, interesting and happy creative time in which we argued a lot about art." Münter's paintings reveal the transition from her previous approach, with its short, heavily charged brushstrokes, to a new fluid style, expressed in compositions in which she progressively eliminated the anecdotal and gave free rein to colour. The following year she and her fellow artists returned to the town and acquired a house on the outskirts which would become her refuge and the epicentre of the early 20th-century, German artistic avant-garde.



School House, Murnau, 1908. Oil on cardboard. 40,6 × 32,7 cm. Carmen Thyssen Collection



5. People:

"Painting portraits is the most daring and difficult, the most spiritual, the most extreme endeavour for an artist." Gabriele Münter was particularly interested in the depiction of people, as evident in her sketchbooks and photographs, with a clear preference for women and children. In these works she reveals a skill in combining a reduction of

Murnau Woman (Rosalie Leiss), 1909. Oil on cardboard, 92 × 64,8 cm. On permanent loan from the Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung, Munich, and the PSM Privatstiftung Schlossmuseum Murnau en el Schlossmuseum Murnau

compositional elements with a fidelity to the physical resemblance of the person portrayed. Following the stylistic change that took place in her work in Murnau, her portraits employ more intense colours, simplified shapes and darker outlines. Above all, Münter painted people from her immediate surroundings, initially locating them against a plain background then later moving towards compositions in which the figures are integrated into genre scenes, located in interiors or in a dialogue with the objects around them.

6. Interiors and objects:

Between 1909 and the outbreak of World War I, Gabriele Münter alternated winters in Munich with long periods at her home in Murnau, which became the subject of some of her paintings and photographs. The utopian ideal she shared with Kandinsky of creating an artistic community linked to the rural world and connected with nature led them to renounce the comforts of the big city and lead a simple life, dressing in typical peasant costume and working on their vegetable patch. Münter discovered the painting on glass typical of the area, a type of folk art with simplified forms and expressive colours divided by thick, dark outlines, which fascinated her as it involved many of the elements she aspired to achieve in her painting. She acquired a number of pieces of this type which she used to decorate her home, as seen in her paintings and photographs. They became key motifs in her still lifes, in which she sought to connect with the spirituality of these primarily devotional objects. She also learned the technique herself and was the first of the group to produce her own works on glass.



Still Life in Gray, 1910. Oil on cardboard, 34,5 × 50,4 cm.
Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau
München, Munich, donated by Gabriele Münter, 1957

7. The blue horsewoman:



Dragon Fight, 1913. Oil on canvas, 78 × 100 cm.
Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art
moderne/Centre de création industrielle, donated by
the Société Kandinsky, 2015

From 1909 Gabriele Münter actively participated in the New Association of Artists in Munich, in the exhibitions of The Blue Rider group from late 1911 and in the publication of its almanac of the same name. The photographs she took at this time demonstrate her role in the group, as well as her sophisticated understanding of the importance of visually recording these events. Like the rest of her companions, Münter aspired to achieve a form of expression that responded to what Kandinsky defined as “inner need”; a genuinely individual form of expression that led each of them to develop a different style even though they shared common sources of inspiration. Like all these artists, Münter was interested in European folk culture

and the art of other continents: she collected children's drawings and copied some of them in a process of “unlearning” which she considered fundamental to her artistic evolution, and although she was an essentially figurative painter, on occasions she came close to abstraction.

8. Exile in Scandinavia:

Following the outbreak of World War I Münter settled in neutral Sweden in July 1915, remaining there until 1920. She encountered the local art scene, which welcomed her as an important representative of the international avant-garde. The decorative Expressionism of these painters, influenced by their master Matisse, soon left its mark on some of her works, resulting in a more graphic style and softened colours. Münter travelled round Sweden and Norway in search of new pictorial motifs to replace her much-missed Murnau, producing landscapes with a greater emphasis on narrative and including small figures. Financial necessity led her to execute numerous commissioned portraits during these years, but she also painted a series of symbolic portraits representing different states of mind, works that reveal a renewed interest in human beings, particularly women.



Future (Woman in Stockholm), 1917. Oil on canvas, 97,5 × 63,8 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Frank E. Taplin, Jr

9. A nomadic life:



Lady in an Armchair, writing (Stenography: Swiss Woman in Pyjamas), 1929. Canvas, 61,5 × 46,2 cm. The Gabriele Münter and Johannes Eichner Foundation, Munich

When Münter returned to Germany in 1920 her close circle of artists had disappeared, including Kandinsky who had returned to Russia during the war and embarked on a new relationship there. With no fixed address, during those years Münter focused on her activity as a graphic artist and on portraying the free and emancipated women with whom she socialised. “It was years before I had a studio. The sketchbook was my friend and the drawings the reflection of what I saw with my eyes [...]. The result was mere sketches, works of the moment, sketches in a couple of strokes [...]. They contained everything I had to say.” After living in various places, in 1925 she moved to Berlin, where she renewed her contacts with the German art world and attended Arthur Segal’s art school. A number of her works from the 1920s are stylistically linked to New Objectivity in their aim of reducing the chromatic range and making any trace of the brushstrokes disappear, although Münter never shifted her focus to the social critique associated with some of the artists of that movement.

10. Return to Murnau:

After a fruitful period in Paris between October 1929 and June 1930 Münter’s itinerant life came to an end in 1931 when she permanently moved into her house in Murnau. The streets and surrounding landscapes once again became the principal themes and motifs of many of her works, paintings in which she frequently revived her own Expressionist tradition. During the years of the Third Reich Münter continued to live in Murnau, progressively reducing her public presence. The end of World War II



Still Life in Front of the Yellow House, 1953. Canvas, 46,5 × 54,5 cm. The Gabriele Münter and Johannes Eichner Foundation, Munich

led to a progressive rediscovery of her art and her reputation started to grow through numerous exhibitions and acquisitions of her work by museums and collectors. Gabriele Münter continued to work in the last years of her life. Some of her final paintings were versions of previous works in which she reflected on her life and artistic career.

On the occasion of her 80th birthday in 1957 Gabriele Münter made a large donation to the Lenbachhaus of works by her own hand and by other members of The Blue Rider group which she had kept hidden in her house during the Nazi period. The result was to transform the Lenbachhaus into the key museum for that artistic movement.

EXHIBITION INFORMATION

Title: *Gabriele Münter. The Great Expressionist Woman Painter*

Organised by: Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza in cooperation with the Gabriele Münter and Johannes Eichner Foundation and the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau München in Munich, co-produced with the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris.

With the collaboration of Comunidad de Madrid and **the support of** the Art Foundation Mentor Lucerne

Venue and dates: Madrid, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, 12 November 2024 to 9 February 2025; París, Musée d'Art Moderne, 4 April to 24 August 2025.

Curators: Marta Ruiz del Árbol, curator of Modern Painting at the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza; Isabelle Jansen, director of the Gabriele Münter and Johannes Eichner Foundation, and Mattias Mühling, president of the Gabriele Münter and Johannes Eichner Foundation and director of the Städtische Galerie am Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau München, Munich.

Number of works: 145 by Gabriele Münter (86 paintings, 21 works on paper and 38 photographs), plus a further 19 photographs, works and various objects. Total: 164.

Publications: Catalogue with texts by Marta Ruiz del Árbol, Anna Storm and Isabelle Jansen. Educational guide and audio guide (Spanish and English). *Gabriele Münter. Las tierras azules*, comic by Mayte Alvarado, co-published with Astiberri.

Associated activities: Lecture series (January/February 2025), film cycle (November/December 2024) and educational project *At full gallop* (November 2024/March 2025, with the collaboration of the German Embassy in Madrid).

VISITOR INFORMATION

Address: Paseo del Prado, 8. 28014, Madrid. Temporary exhibition galleries, ground floor.

Opening hours: Tuesday to Sunday, 10 am to 7 pm; Saturdays, 10 am to 11 pm. Closed on Mondays.

UNIQLO SATURDAYS: Free entry every Saturday, 9 pm to 11 pm



Ticket prices: Combined entry: Permanent collection and temporary exhibitions.

Standard: €14; reduced: €10 for visitors over 65, pensioners and students with proof of status; Groups (7 and more people): €12 per person; free: children under 18 years of age, officially unemployed Spanish citizens, disabled visitors, Large Families, working teachers and holders of the Youth Card and European Youth Card. Advance ticket sales at the box office, on the museum's website and from tel: (+34) 91 791 13 70.

More information: <https://www.museothyssen.org/en>

PRESS INFORMATION: <https://www.museothyssen.org/en/private-area/press/dossiers/gabriele-munter>