



## Münter: On the brink of Der Blaue Reiter

Gabriele Münter (1877-1962) was a German expressionist painter. Around the early years of the 1900's Münter studied under, then later collaborated with, the Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky. She became active in the German art scene immediately preceding the outbreak of World War I, particularly as a founding member of the groups Neue Künstlervereinigung München and Der Blaue Reiter<sup>1</sup>. The Münter paintings scanned are part of the Bradley Collection of Modern Art, organized into a special exhibit celebrating the 50th anniversary of the collection at the Milwaukee Art Museum. The paintings were left in place on the wall at the exhibit and scanned in situ during a time when the exhibit was closed to the public<sup>2</sup>.



Figure 1. Gabriele Münter (German, 1877–1962). *Girl with Doll (Mädchen mit Puppe)*, 1908–09. Part of the Bradley Collection of Modern Art at the Milwaukee Art Museum.



Figure 2. *Girl with Doll*. The infrared image captured with the RevealScan-M shows an underdrawing at the bottom of the painting partially concealed beneath the girl's feet.

Capturing Münter's work with the RevealScan-M multi-range, multispectral camera uncovers some surprising details in her early expressionist compositions. In one of the Münter paintings analyzed, *Girl with Doll* (Figure 1), there are a few black streaks visible in the painting near the girl's feet, invisible by just inspecting the painting. Looking at the infrared reflectance images captured by the RevealScan-M however, the streaks by the girl's feet turn out to be part of a face that was painted over in the final painting, see Figure 2. Rotating that image 180° as in Figure 3, the face is that of the same girl with a bow in her hair. The similarity between this outline and the girl in the painting suggests Münter started drawing the girl in partial profile, was likely unhappy with the outline, and flipped the canvas to start over.



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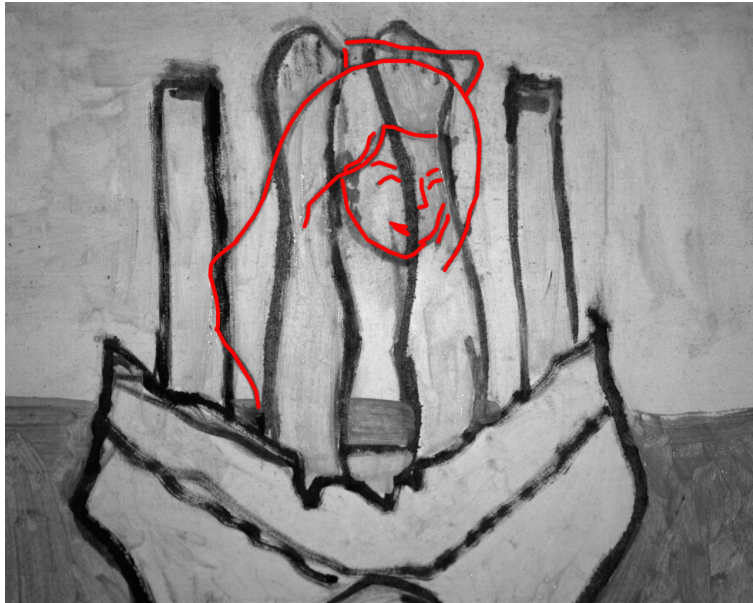


Figure 3. Rotating the RevealScan image by 180° and outlining the underpainting shows a face of a girl with a same bow in her hair as in the final painting. The line width of the concealed outline appears to be thinner than outline of the final painting indicating the use of charcoal, not the thicker, more irregular width paint of the finished painting. The face seems slightly turned although not directly looking at viewer. Taking all these observations into consideration, it is reasonable to suggest that the underdrawing was an earlier form of the outline that was found unsatisfactory to Münter, so she rotated the canvas and started over.



Figure 4. Gabriele Münter (German, 1877–1962). Boating, 1910, oil on canvas, Part of the Bradley Collection of Modern Art at the Milwaukee Art Museum.

Another one of Münter’s famous early works, Boating (Figure 4), also contains details revealed with infrared imaging. The wide hat of the woman facing the viewer is quite unnaturally asymmetrical on the original. To improve this, part of the hat on the right side was covered up to balance the hat a bit better, see Figure 5.

It is interesting to observe compositional changes in both Girl with Doll and Boating given that these works were created right around the time Neue Künstlervereinigung München was created. Since Münter was very much experimenting with new techniques and styles during this time period, it makes sense that these paintings would have compositional changes. With the RevealScan-M, we are offered a peak into Münter’s creative process, during the ascension of her signature style as an artist.



Figure 5. Boating. Combination of 1650 nm and 1200 nm wavelength images indicate that the right side of the hat was originally even wider, but reduced and painted over in the final composition.

1. Shulamith Behr. (2020). The dynamics of gendered artistic identity and creativity in Der Blaue Reiter. In Dorothy Price. German Expressionism Der Blaue Reiter and its Legacies. (1st ed., pp. 78-103). Manchester University Press.

2. The Bradley Collection of Modern Art, A Bold Vision for Milwaukee. Special Exhibit, September 26, 2025, through January 19, 2026, Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee Wisconsin.