



Today's Masterpiece: Gabriele Münter, [*Wooden Doll*](#), 1909. Oil on canvas board. Gift from the Estate of Vance E. Kondon and Liesbeth Giesberger, 2011.121.



Welcome back to **Masterpiece Minute at Virtual SDMA**. This is your host, **Rachel Jans**, Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art. Drop in each month to hear a new mini talk led by SDMA curators or guests focusing on works from the Museum's collection.

Gabriele Münter's intimately scaled painting, *Wooden Doll*, pulses with energy and vivid color. Affiliated with the German Expressionists in Munich, Münter made this tightly cropped painting in 1909. In it, she rendered a table-top scene featuring a wooden doll in bright red and capped with a green hat. Paying more attention to the feeling each object conjures rather than portraying them in a "realistic" manner, Münter painted the doll, as well other items, including pieces of fruit, a vase, and a pitcher, in simplified forms and solid, often dissonant, colors.

The wooden doll is both a child's plaything and an example of folk art. One of the ways Münter and her fellow German Expressionists sought to create a new spirit of painting was by turning to traditions outside of bourgeois culture, including children and traditional crafts, which were viewed as creative forces unsullied by society. Attracted to its bold colors and simple patterns, Münter collected all sorts of folk art, including the wooden doll, during her visits to the village of Murnau in the foothills of the Alps. It was there that she also found inspiration in the custom of *Hinterglasmalerei* or reverse painting on glass, which she collected and even studied with a local artisan. Indeed, the thick black outlines encircling each object in this painting are reminiscent of this traditional Bavarian artform.

1909 was an important year for the artist: she perfected her vivid, abstract style; she bought a home in Murnau, which became a frequent gathering place for other German Expressionist artists; and she was also a founding member of the *Neue Künstlervereinigung* [New Artists Society] in Munich, through which many artists exhibited their art, including Wassily Kandinsky (who had been her teacher and was at the time her romantic partner). Münter and other members of this association would later splinter to form the renowned group, the *Blaue Reiter*, in 1911.

Münter was adventurous, worldly, and one of the few women artists of her generation to receive recognition equal to her male peers. Before she made her life in southern Germany, she traveled throughout the United States, North Africa, and Europe. Seen in this light, her choice to paint still life interiors, a genre not favored in Germany at the time, might seem counterintuitive. Yet, as scholars have noted, this seemingly ordinary subject was not in spite of her unconventional life, but an outcome of it. Her romantic companion, Kandinsky, was still married at the time, and when in Munich, she avoided joining him in public. Because of this, Münter spent ample time with Kandinsky and their small circle of artist friends in the privacy of domestic spaces. This painting—and the many interior scenes Münter created during this time—highlights the refuge she found in the home and the stimulation she found in the rich folk traditions in the countryside. Despite her isolation, she became a leading artist of her generation, elevating the still life genre and instilling it with new vitality.



Today's Masterpiece: Gabriele Münter, [*Wooden Doll*](#), 1909. Oil on canvas board. Gift from the Estate of Vance E. Kondon and Liesbeth Giesberger, 2011.121.