

Enclosed
Gardens *of*
Mechelen

This book was published on the occasion of the completion of the Enclosed Gardens project of the Museum Hof van Busleyden, Mechelen and KU Leuven, Illuminare – Centre for the Study of Medieval Art (2014-2018). The essays in this publication were presented during the conference *Imaging Utopia: New Perspectives on Northern Renaissance Art. XXth Symposium for the Study of Underdrawing and Technology in Painting* (Illuminare – Centre for the Study of Medieval Art, 11 January 2017, Mechelen).

Enclosed Gardens *of* Mechelen

Lieve Watteuw & Hannah Iterbeke (eds.)

Late Medieval
Paradise
Gardens
Revealed

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Foreword by the Editors

ILL. 1 (pages 4–5)
Virgin with the unicorn
– Garden with the
Hunt of the Unicorn

ILL. 2
John the Evangelist, an
angel with a horn and
two dogs on a leash –
Garden with the Hunt
of the Unicorn

This book about the Enclosed Gardens of Mechelen is the result of an intense and long-standing collaboration between the city of Mechelen, the KU Leuven and various national and international experts. The extraordinary interest in these unique mixed-media objects prompted a large-scale research and conservation project, which ran from 2014 to 2018.

The initial results of this extensive and interdisciplinary trajectory were presented in Mechelen on 11 January 2017 during the conference ‘Imaging Utopia: New Perspectives on Northern Renaissance Art. XXth Symposium for the Study of Underdrawing and Technology in Painting’, organised by Illuminare – Centre for the Study of Medieval Art (KU Leuven) and Museums & Heritage Mechelen. This publication collates the various findings of historians, art historians and curators. In addition, several experts were invited to write an introductory essay for this monograph. The synergy that poured forth has resulted in a particularly multifaceted reference work on the early sixteenth-century Enclosed Gardens of Mechelen.

The publication comprises five parts. Each part contains one or more in-depth essay and shorter contextual texts that explain specific elements of the Gardens. In the first part, an introductory essay on the historiography of the Enclosed Gardens is followed by a catalogue, which includes brief descriptions of the seven examples from Mechelen.

The second part examines the historical and socio-cultural landscape of the city. In the third section, the authors explore the iconological significance of the paradisiacal gardens. Section four focuses on the wealth of artefacts they contain: painted wings, *poupées de Malines*, silk flowers, pilgrim badges, devotional materials, alabaster figurines and gold brocade. The concluding section charts the complex conservation project around the Gardens and the technical and material research that was conducted, all of which sheds new light on the creation of these extraordinary mixed-media altarpieces from the late Middle Ages. A prominent place is given to beautiful reproductions of hitherto unphotographed details. The intense and painstaking conservation treatments of the last four years have been recorded in a range of unique scientific images.

The Enclosed Gardens of Mechelen have not yet revealed all their secrets. This is borne out by the differing views on their history, context and production. The editors of this publication have gladly provided a forum for these diverse findings and interpretations. We very much hope that this book about the enigmatic Enclosed Gardens will not only inspire researchers, but also encourage them to ask new questions and to continue their investigations.

Lieve Watteeuw and Hannah Iterbeke
November 2018



Foreword

III. 3

Female figure on a socle with the coat of arms of the city of Mechelen (three pales) – Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn

The Enclosed Gardens are the undoubted highlight of any visit to the new Museum Hof van Busleyden in Mechelen. Visitors make their way through the museum to the final rooms, where the Enclosed Gardens are on display, consciously conceived by architects and scenographers as the museum's treasure chamber, or holy of holies. Since 2011 this extraordinary ensemble of seven small retable cabinets, created in the sixteenth century for and in part by the Augustinian sisters of the Hospital of Our Lady in Mechelen, has been officially – and deservedly – recognised as a Flemish Masterpiece. These unique mixed-media artefacts, containing hundreds of small component parts, represent an idealised spiritual and paradisiacal world. In addition to painted panels and polychrome statuettes (the *poupées de Malines*), the Enclosed Gardens include textile fragments, silk flowers, metal badges, relics, tiny pieces of glass and crystal, paper and parchment, wax and pipe clay, human bones...

The seven Enclosed Gardens are part of the historic collection held by the Mechelen hospital sisters (and currently under the guardianship of the De Beata Vita Foundation). Since 1999, they have been on permanent loan to the Museum Hof van Busleyden (formerly the Stedelijke Musea Mechelen), the objective being to make them accessible to the general public and to preserve them under optimum conditions. The importance of these masterpieces to the city of Mechelen and the museum goes without saying. Owing to their unique nature and fragile beauty, they are very popular with the public and contribute towards Mechelen's richness and appeal as one of the Flemish Art Cities.

The prestigious exhibition *In Search of Utopia*, held at M-Museum Leuven in 2016-17, was directly responsible for providing the impetus of the Enclosed Gardens conservation/restoration project initiated in 2014. After all, it was at that exhibition,

curated by Prof. dr. Jan Van der Stock, that the first three restored Gardens (the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn*, the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* and the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne*) were put on view – something which would have been unimaginable without thorough conservation and restoration of the terribly brittle retable cabinets. This comprehensive and delicate process was realised by a unique and successful partnership between a variety of research centres, scientists and academics, and an interdisciplinary team of conservator-restorers under the direction of Joke Vandermeersch and Hilde Weissenborn, in collaboration with the museum. This extensive monograph contains reflections on the research results and knowledge acquired during the course of the restoration project.

The publication of this important academic work bolsters the museum in its core mission and supports its basic functions. The research provides a valuable foundation for broad, multi-level discourse with the public, and offers new ways to increase audience engagement, from multimedia applications to educational work. This monograph – compiled by research coordinator Prof. dr. Lieve Watteeuw, attached to the KU Leuven and a conservator-restorer, and Hannah Iterbeke, a conservator at the Museum Hof van Busleyden – is also of great importance to the further investigation into the Enclosed Gardens phenomenon and other mixed-media artefacts, both in Belgium and abroad. Thanks to the many years that the restoration process has taken, the museum has been able to build long-lasting relationships with the scientists, conservator-restorers and research centres involved, as well as the project's financial backers and the general public.

First and foremost, we must mention the City of Mechelen for mobilising the necessary funding for the Enclosed Gardens project. The museum received substantial support from the Baillet Latour Fund

and the King Baudouin Foundation, and grants were also obtained via the Flanders Masterpieces Council. The Friends of the Museum Hof van Busleyden also contributed to the project, as did the general public – via successful crowdfunding campaigns. Completion of this monograph was made possible only thanks to the generous support of Dr. Bettina Leysen, who can justifiably be called the patron of the Enclosed Gardens.

On behalf of the City of Mechelen and the Museum Hof van Busleyden, we would like to take this opportunity to give our sincere thanks to all the partners concerned. Special thanks must go to Illuminare – Centre for the Study of Medieval Art (KU Leuven) and to Prof. dr. Lieve Watteeuw for her tireless commitment to this project. We would also like to mention KU[N]ST Leuven – a collaborative platform between the City of Leuven and the KU Leuven – which helped open up the project following the exhibition *In Search of Utopia* in 2017. The third partner essential to the project's success was the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA). We also owe a debt of gratitude to all the members of the project's scientific committee and the research council. Finally, we would like to thank all the scholars for their vital contributions to this monograph, and we are also grateful to Hannibal Publishing (for the Dutch edition) and Amsterdam University Press (for the English edition).

We wish you an instructive journey through the astonishing world of the Enclosed Gardens, and we hope that you will come to cherish this publication as much as we do the Gardens themselves.

Bart Somers, *Mayor, City of Mechelen*

Björn Siffer, *Alderman for Culture, Tourism and Part-Time Arts Education, City of Mechelen*

Anouk Stulens and Sigrid Bosmans, *Managing Director and Artistic Director, Museum Hof van Busleyden*



Introduction

The Rediscovery of the Enclosed Gardens of Mechelen



ILL. 4

The Enclosed Gardens of Mechelen, or Paradise Gardens, are intimate devotional retables and remarkable visual spectacles dating from the first half of the sixteenth century, which pique the viewer's curiosity. Thanks to their uniqueness, they fully live up to their status as the crown jewels of Mechelen (Ill. 4).

When the small *Enclosed Garden with a Crucified Christ* (G5) was opened in 2016, the curators discovered a tiny rolled-up note among the flowers on the peat base. It was just a few centimetres in size. The brittle paper carried a message from Sister Victoria Herlin, written in 1806 upon the death of her fellow Sister, Benedicta Meganck, in the Hospital of Our Lady (Onze-Lieve-Vrouwegasthuis) in Mechelen: 'With Sister Victoria, in the year 1806, I took this little chapel from the cell of Sister Benedicta Meganck,¹ after her death. And removed, cleaned and replaced all the flowers. In these / bones and stones and I did not add any letters:² Upon reading this message, the team of researchers immediately understood that the attention paid to the Gardens in the Augustinian monastery, and how they were looked after and cherished, was founded upon a centuries-long tradition of profound reverence (Ill. 5).

Bij Suster Victoria int jaer 1806 heb ik dit Capelleken
de goode van Suster benedicta Meganck Van haer cel
bloomken en daer uijt gehad en gekuijst en Heer in ge
gebeentens en Steentens en hebbe ik geen brief den bij

en ugerde
alle de
in die
en

ILL. 5



III. 4
Note made by Sister
Victoria (1806) –
Garden with a
Crucified Christ

III. 5
Rolled-up note made
by Sister Victoria
(1806), found on
the peat base when
opening up the Garden
with a Crucified Christ
in 2017

III. 6
Garden with a Calvary

III. 6

Following the somewhat fragmentary research that was undertaken in the twentieth century, the study of the Enclosed Gardens of Mechelen gathered momentum from 2011 onwards. The art-historical context was first explored in an important article by Camille Poupeye entitled 'Les Jardins clos & leurs rapports avec la Sculpture malinoise' (1912).³ After this, however, everything fell quiet around the Gardens. Paul Vandebroek's exhibition catalogue, *Hooglied. De beeldwereld van religieuze vrouwen in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden, vanaf de 13de eeuw* (1994), in which the Enclosed Gardens were considered from an anthropological, psychoanalytical and spiritual viewpoint, sparked a revival of interest.⁴ The deeper symbolic meaning of the objects in the overloaded wooden cabinets was linked to the spiritual life of the nuns. The exhibition *800 jaar Onze-Lieve-Vrouwegasthuis* (1998) in Mechelen and the studies by Simone Scholten (1996) and Monika Triest (1998), which looked at the works from a historical and religious perspective, brought the phenomenon of 'Enclosed Gardens' even more to the fore.⁵ The relationship between the art of the nuns and the social history of female spirituality was elaborated by Jeffrey F. Hamburger, curator of the exhibition *Krone und Schleier. Kunst aus Mittelalterlichen Frauenklöstern* (2005).⁶ Thanks to these historical and cultural studies, the Gardens came to the attention of a wider audience via the exhibition *Dames met klasse* (also 2005).⁷ Dagmar Eichberger integrated the Gardens into the discourse about Margaret of Austria's dynastic politics and considered the cabinets from the perspective of gender and devotional practices. She also looked at how these customs impacted upon art and culture. Marjolijn Kruij published further new insights in her thesis *In beeld gebracht. De sculptuur in laatmiddeleeuwse Besloten Hoffjes* (2006).⁸

The burgeoning interest in the Enclosed Gardens of Mechelen triggered further research and stimulated numerous essays. Barbara Baert published 'Echoes of Liminal Spaces. Revisiting the Late Mediaeval "Enclosed Gardens" of the Low Countries' in the *Jaarboek Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen* (2012)⁹ and 'Late Medieval Enclosed Gardens of the Low Countries: Contributions to Gender and Artistic Expression' in the series *Studies in Iconology*.¹⁰ In her research, Baert suggested that the significance of the creative process behind the Enclosed Gardens is an

effect of the sensory stimuli – the 'sensorium' – that they emanate. In 2017, Baert and Hannah Iterbeke collaborated on an iconological interpretation of the Enclosed Gardens that was published in the journal *Textile: Cloth and Culture: 'Revisiting the Enclosed Gardens of the Low Countries (Fifteenth Century Onwards). Gender, Textile, and the Intimate Space as Horticulture'*. In this essay, they established the connection between pictorial language and the cultural identity of the Gardens, which are firmly anchored in the early sixteenth-century mystical traditions of the Low Countries.¹¹ In 'Cultivating Devotion: The Sixteenth-Century Enclosed Gardens of the Low Countries' (2017), Hannah Iterbeke explored the Gardens as a form of spiritual 'horticulture'.¹² In 2018, together with Iterbeke and Watteuw, Baert published a synthesis of these themes in an essay entitled 'Late Medieval Enclosed Gardens of the Low Countries. Mixed Media, Remnant Art, Récyclage and Gender in the Low Countries (16th century onwards)', which was published in *The Agency of Things*.¹³

The book historian Kathryn M. Rudy argued in her publication *Virtual Pilgrimages in the Convent. Imagining Jerusalem in the Late Middle Ages* that the sensory experience of beholding the crucifix and the relics in the Gardens was akin to a spiritual pilgrimage for the sisters.¹⁴ The same author, writing in *Postcards on Parchment: The Social Lives of Medieval Books* (2015), expanded upon the idea of the Garden as a sensorium and noted the exceptional haptic qualities of the works, the iconological significance of their creation and the diversity of the inscriptions they contain.¹⁵ Finally, in 'Sensory Piety as Social Intervention in a Mechelen *Besloten Hoffje*' (2017), Andrea Pearson elaborated on the meaning of the Gardens within the historical-social network of sixteenth-century Mechelen and explored the relationships between their commissioners and recipients¹⁶ (Ill. 7).

A number of important historical exhibitions also played a vital role in securing the reputation of the Enclosed Gardens of Mechelen. In 1864, the historian James Weale – in the catalogue to an exhibition on religious art in the Hotel de Liedekerke in Mechelen – described the Gardens as *chappelles de reliques*, or reliquary chapels.¹⁷ In the twentieth century, the Gardens rarely left the Hospital of Our Lady, with only single examples presented in a handful of exhibitions in Mechelen,



III. 7
Black and white
negative of the Garden
with the Hunt of the
Unicorn, 1917–18.
Kommission für die
photographische
Inventarisierung
der belgischen
Kunstdenkmäler

Antwerp and Brussels. One of the most important exhibitions was *Les anciens métiers d'art malinois, d'art religieux* (Mechelen, 1911).¹⁸ After the inclusion of an Enclosed Garden in two exhibitions – *Kerkelijke Kunstschatten* (Antwerp, 1948) and *Oude Mechelse Kunstambachten* (Mechelen, 1954) – one of the works was also exhibited in Leuven as part of *Aspecten van de laatgotiek in Brabant* (1971) and in the two-venue exhibition *Stad in Vlaanderen* (1991), which was curated by Jan Van der Stock and shown in Brussels and in Schallaburg, Austria.¹⁹ After the sisters gave the Enclosed Gardens to the city of Mechelen in 1998, they were installed in the Schepenhuis and later in De Zalm (on the occasion of the exhibition *800 jaar Onze-Lieve-Vrouwegasthuis* in 1998). One or more Gardens have been shown in each of the following exhibitions: *Hooglied* (Brussels, 1994),²⁰ *Het Mechelse Meubel 1500-2000* (Mechelen, 2000), which took place during the Charles V commemorative year, *Krone und Schleier* (Bonn, 2005), *Dames met klasse* (Mechelen, 2005),²¹ *Hoop en Geluk* (Bruges, 2006) and *Op zoek naar Utopia* (Leuven, 2016-17).²²

The seven Enclosed Gardens of Mechelen have been on permanent display at the Museum Hof van Busleyden since the summer of 2018.

Yet, despite the rediscovery of the Gardens and the ensuing stream of publications (or perhaps because of this interest), many pertinent questions remain unanswered. Were the Enclosed Gardens exclusively intended for the Augustinian sisters? Who was involved in their production? What position did they occupy within the urban landscape surrounding Margaret of Austria's court? How were the hundreds of flowers, numerous pilgrim badges, *patacons*, pipe-clay medallions and papier-mâché figures created? Until a few years ago, it was assumed that the sisters of the Hospital of Our Lady were exclusively responsible for the craftsmanship of the Enclosed Gardens of Mechelen. But it is also possible that the Gardens were donated to the monastery by wealthy citizens or families. Donors are depicted in various gardens, for example, and the recent archival, material and technical research also points in the direction of professional manufacture. What was the role of craftsmen, guilds and

ILL. 8

Christ on the Cross surrounded by silk flowers, vines, *paperolles*, bunches of grapes, brass discs and metal sequins – Garden with a Calvary



the sisters themselves in the production of the gardens? Who commissioned and donated them, either in part or in their entirety?

In different ways, the essays in this monograph argue that the Enclosed Gardens are not a homogeneous group of objects that were made in Mechelen during a specific production phase in the first half of the sixteenth century. Instead, they bear witness to a broad and varied approach towards artistic production, patronage and image reception in the Southern Netherlands of the early modern era (ILL. 8).

The new research data pertaining to the paradisiacal gardens of Mechelen, which is collated in this monograph, is divided into five sections. Each section provides descriptions, which are further developed or contain new insights about the Enclosed Gardens of Mechelen. Previously unpublished photographs reveal the diverse and wonderful compositions within the Gardens and illustrate the various theses and discoveries. The first section takes the form of a detailed catalogue with a bibliography for the seven Enclosed Gardens. Section two explains the historical context of Mechelen and the historiography of the Augustinian sisters within the city. The third section delves deeper into the meaning of the Gardens, with a contribution about the historical sources relating to their creation, the *paperolles* and the meaning of the inscription on one of the fences in the Gardens, which refers to the Song of Songs.

The extensive fourth section examines the materials and artefacts found in the Gardens. The hundreds of objects that were shaped into complex topographies bear witness to the diversity and originality of sixteenth-century artistic craftsmanship. It is to this that the Gardens owe their uniqueness. For example, the small sculptures known as *poupées de Malines* ('Mechelen dolls') hail from several workshops that were active in the first half of the sixteenth century. These 'dolls' reveal an evolution in their stylistic characteristics, which indicates that the Gardens were created or composed at different times. A plethora of artefacts were recycled or repurposed and added to the Gardens: pilgrims' insignia, wax Agnus Dei, *patacons*, medallions and pipe-clay figurines. Skilfully mounted relics on fabric and brass plaques play an important devotional role in five of the seven gardens. The study of the materials during the extensive conservation treatment generated a wealth of information about the creative processes involved. A close reading of each of the Enclosed Gardens, and every individual artefact within them, proved to be particularly valuable and yielded surprising results. Their visual and aesthetic qualities, the structural elements, cultural references and iconographic significance were all studied; but so too was their coherence and how they correspond to and reinforce certain iconographic themes or specific historical events. In this context, the Gardens were 'read' and 'reread' numerous times during the research period, in all layers and forms, and by a wide range of experts working in the field of cultural sciences, thereby enabling a network of information to be formed.

The final section of this monograph presents an in-depth discussion of the project to conserve the Gardens and includes detailed descriptions, scientific images and analyses of the cabinets, artefacts and painted shutters.

Despite many years of in-depth research and conservation, we still do not fully understand the sixteenth-century Enclosed Gardens of Mechelen. And because these reliquaries or Paradise Gardens do not give up their secrets easily, they remain an enigma within our cultural history.

**Lieve Watteuw, Barbara Baert
and Jan Van der Stock**

*Illuminare, Centre for the Study
of Medieval Art (KU Leuven)*

1 Sister Benedicta Meganck was born on 21 December 1750 in Aalst and took her vows on 15 February 1776. She died on 16 November 1806 in Mechelen. Her death notice states that her maiden name was Catharina. Victoria Herlin's maiden name was Anna Catharina. She was born on 29 April 1765 in Antwerp, took her vows on 10 September 1793 and died on 11 March 1828 in Mechelen. Jaak Ockeley, *De gasthuizusters en hun ziekenzorg in het aartsbisdom Mechelen in de 17de en de 18de eeuw* (Brussels: Archief- en Bibliotheekwezen in België, 1992), 2 parts, extra number 44, part 2, p.781.

2 Original Dutch: 'Bij suster Victoria int jaar 1806 heb ik dit Capelleken [genom]en naer de / de dood van suster benedicta Meganck van haer cel. End[e] alle de / bloomenkens daer uijt gehad en gekuijst en weer in ged[ae]n. In die / gebeentens en steenkens en hebbe ik geen briefven bij g[edae]n.'

3 Camille Poupeye, 'Les Jardins clos & leurs rapports avec la Sculpture malinoise'; *Bulletin du Cercle Archéologique de Malines*, (1912): 51-114. Poupeye's publication set the standard for research into the sculpture of Mechelen and the Enclosed Gardens throughout the 20th century. Although the references to the publications and exhibitions included in the essay reflect the most important events, it is not an exhaustive list. See also the bibliography to the individual catalogue entries for each Garden.

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6 Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Robert Suckale, 'Zwischen Diesseits und Jen-seits. Die Kunst der geistlichen Frauen im Mittelalter.' in *Krone und Schleier. Kunst aus mittelalterlichen Frauenklöstern*, Jutta Frings, ed., exhib. cat. (Essen/Bonn/Munich, 2005), 21-39.

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13 Barbara Baert, Hannah Iterbeke and Lieve Watteeuw, 'Late Medieval Enclosed Gardens of the Low Countries. Mixed Media, Remnant Art, Récyclage and Gender in the Low Countries (16th century onwards)'; in *The Agency of Things in Medieval and Early Modern Art: Materials, Power and Manipulation*, eds. Grazyna Jurkowlaniec, Ika Matyjaszkiewicz and Zuzanna Sarnecka (New York: Routledge, 2018), 33-48.

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15 Kathryn M. Rudy, *Postcards on Parchment: The Social Lives of Medieval Books* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2015).

16 Andrea Pearson, 'Sensory Piety as Social Intervention in a Mechelen *Besloten Hoffje*'; *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 9, no. 2 (Summer 2017). DOI: 10.5092/JHNA.2017.9.2.1.

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18 Anonymous, *Exposition des anciens métiers d'art malinois, d'art religieux de la province d'Anvers et de folklore local*, exhib. cat. (Mechelen, 1911).

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20 Vandebroeck, *Hooglied*, 2005.

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22 Jan Van der Stock, ed., *Op zoek naar Utopia* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2016).

III. 9 (pages 16–17)
Ground base with
flowers and a fence –
Garden with a Crucified
Christ





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CATALOGUE OF THE SEVEN ENCLOSED GARDENS OF MECHELEN

HANNAH ITERBEKE

The seven Enclosed Gardens of Mechelen are extraordinary sixteenth-century reliquaries that contain not only relics but also papier-mâché seals, jewellery, *poupées de Malines*, glass beads and pilgrim badges against a background of silk vegetation. Together, these objects create a garden enclosed by a gate, as praised in the Song of Songs. These mixed-media shrines were assembled, organised and cherished by the sisters of the Hospital of Our Lady in Mechelen for more than 500 years. The Gardens are a unique expression of the spiritual ‘horticulture’ of the convent.

III. 10

The Mechelen
Enclosed Gardens,
oak retable cabinets
with closed shutters

Enclosed Garden with a Calvary and the Hunt of the Unicorn

Bibliography:

Weale 1864: 16, nr. 149; Neeffs 1876: 274–275, nr. 215; Willocx 1895: 91; Anonymous 1911: 31–32, nr. 121; Poupeye 1912: 81–82; Godenne 1957: 120–125, nr. XXXVIII–XLV; De Borghgrave d'Altena 1959: 66; Crab 1977: 451–454, MB/36; Vandebroeck 1994: 120–125, 251, nr. 114; De Nijn 1998: 49, 55–56, nr. 51; De Nijn 2000: 125–126, nr. 3; Van der Stock 2016: 214–217, nr. 32.

Short title:

Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn

This Enclosed Garden combines two different narratives related to Christ's virgin birth and Salvation. The first group of polychromed statues depicts the hunt of the unicorn. At the bottom left the angel blows on his horn while holding two dogs on a leash. At the bottom right, a unicorn is seeking shelter in the Virgin's lap.

The unicorn was widely perceived as a wild and untameable beast that no hunter could catch; according to tradition, only a pure virgin was able to tame the savage creature. This theme of the hunt symbolises the incarnation of Christ, because it was only in the womb of the purest virgin, the Mother Mary, that the word became flesh. A Latin inscription on the gate of this Enclosed Garden further emphasises the purity of Mary: 'You are a garden, overflowing with virtues and countless treasures, never tainted with any filth, growing a flower full of graces.'¹ The garden is thus a metaphor for the Virgin Mary while the flower symbolises the Christ Child. At the bottom of the Enclosed Garden, one can read another inscription in Latin connecting the virgin birth to Salvation: 'The unicorn, breaking out of a strong kingdom in paradise, becomes tame again in the lap of a virgin, thus cleansing us from a sinful poison.'² The theme of the Holy Hunt has been supplemented with other symbolic references to the virgin birth of Jesus, such as the Tower of David, the fleece of Gideon, the flowering rod of Aaron, the golden pot (*urna aurea*), the sealed fountain and the burning bush of Moses.

The second sculpture group consists of a crucified Christ mounted on an altar and surrounded by ten candles. Standing on either side of the cross are St John the Evangelist, with his poisoned cup, and Mary Magdalene, with her jar of ointment. A small statue of God is looking down upon Christ's sacrifice.

The wooden case of this Enclosed Garden was probably not made in the same period as the early sixteenth-century sculptures. The ornaments at the bottom of the case are identical to those in a wooden cabinet from the Hospital of Our Lady, which, according to an inscription in the woodwork, was made in 1622.³ Could it be possible that the original sixteenth-century framework was replaced in the seventeenth century? This might explain why this is the only Enclosed Garden of the Hospital of Our Lady without painted wings.

¹ *Tu es hortus cunctis deliciis affluens multisque divitiis, nullis umquam tactus spurcitiis gignens florem reffectum gratiis.*

² The Latin inscription reads: *Reynoceron forti imperio egressus de celi palatio virginis mansuescit in gremio nos veneni purgans a vicio.*

³ *Closet* (no signature, 1622, 200 × 217.5 × 83 cm, OCMW, Collection Sisters of the Hospital of Our Lady, inv. GHZ M004)

Ill. 11 & Ill. 12 (detail on pages 24–25)
**G1 – Enclosed Garden with a Calvary and the
Hunt of the Unicorn**, Mechelen
c. 1510-1530
125.8 × 159.2 × 33.6 cm

Museum Hof van Busleyden – Collection Sisters
of the Hospital of Our Lady, inv. GHZ BH001
Provenance: On permanent loan from
the Hospital of Our Lady, Mechelen





e celi palano

Tu es ortus

et

divinus

hinc spurcibus gignens



nūctis deliciis affluēs mult

Mullis

vmq̄ tar

florē refectionē gratiē

virginis

et m

Enclosed Garden with Sts Elisabeth, Ursula and Catherine

Bibliography:

Weale 1864: 15, nr. 147; Neeffs 1876: 272–273, nr. 213; Willocx 1895: 90; Anonymous 1911: 31, nr. 119; Poupeye 1912: 78–79; Van Doorslaer 1912: 20–21, nr. 78; Janssen 1948: 50, nr. 352; Godenne 1957: 110–116, nr. XXX–XXXII; De Borghgrave d'Altena 1959: 67; Derveaux-Van Ussel 1970: nr. 26; Crab 1977: 421–423, MB/37; Brokken 1990: 189; Vandenbroeck 1994: 239, nr. 114; De Nijn 1998: 54, nr. 49; De Nijn 2000: 124–125, nr. 3; Koldewey 2006: 247–256; Kruij 2006a: 55–56; Kruij 2006b: 231–234; Van der Stock 2016: 220–223, nr. 33; Pearson 2017.

Short title:

Garden with St Ursula

Amid an overwhelming amount of silk fauna and flora one can discover three female saints: St Elisabeth with her crown, book and crippled beggar at her feet; St Ursula protecting the eleven thousand virgins under her cloak while holding the three arrows responsible for her death, and St Catherine with a golden sword in her hands trampling the emperor Maxentius. All three statuettes are stamped with the Mechelen maker's mark and carry the inscription *DOERMAEL* on their socles.¹ Between these sculptures, two small figures illustrate a *noli me tangere* scene, with Mary Magdalene kneeling in front of the resurrected Christ. This Enclosed Garden is one of the best kept and richest examples of the Mechelen collection. Not only are these sculptures fine examples of the *poupées de Malines*, the mixed-media triptych is also filled with a varied amount of precious *devotionalia*.

A large Agnus Dei depicting Christ's Resurrection (dated 1513), small miniatures on parchment, pilgrim badges from nearby sacred sites and numerous relics accompanied by authentiques upholster the devotional cabinet. The tinfoil that used to cover the background of the wooden case has faded into salmon-coloured paper. In the sixteenth century this covering would have looked like a sun-reflecting golden layer, as if the Enclosed Garden was glistening divine light.

The painted wings of the Garden show one male and two female figures accompanied by their patron saints, the Apostle James the Greater and St Margaret. The man, wearing a lavish fur-lined cloak, is kneeling in front of a prayer desk with his hands folded in prayer. The Apostle James, standing next to him, was freely modelled after a woodcut by Jacob Cornelisz. van Oostanen published c. 1521.² Just like her male counterpart, the first, slightly older-looking woman on the right wing is dressed in more luxurious clothing. The second female figure, however, is dressed as a professed hospital sister. Previously these three figures were considered superiors at the Hospital of Our Lady. However, recent research has identified them as Jacob Van den Putte, Margaretha Svos and their daughter Maria Van den Putte, who professed in the Hospital of Our Lady in 1524.³ Supposedly, the parents of Sister Van den Putte commissioned this Garden after the profession of their daughter.

¹ See the essay by Fanny Cayron and Delphine Steyaert, pp. 134–145.

² See: *St James Major* (woodcut, no signature, c. 1520, 135 × 85 mm, British Museum, Prints & Drawings, inv. 1909,0729.4).

³ Andrea Pearson, 'Sensory Piety as Social Intervention in a Mechelen *Besloten Hofje*', *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 9:2 (Summer 2017).

Ill. 13 & Ill. 14 (detail on pages 28–29)
**G2 – Enclosed Garden with Sts Elisabeth, Ursula
and Catherine**, Mechelen
c. 1524–1530
134.5 × 194 × 25 cm

Museum Hof van Busleyden – Collection Sisters
of the Hospital of Our Lady, inv. GHZ BH002
Provenance: On permanent loan from
the Hospital of Our Lady, Mechelen





Sanctae Barbae

HEINRICH

1511



Enclosed Garden with a Calvary, the Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist

Bibliography:

Weale 1864: 16, nr. 150;
Neeffs 1876: 275, nr. 216;
Willocx 1895: 91–92;
Anonymous 1911: 32,
nr. 122; Poupeye 1912:
83–84; Janssen 1948: 50,
nr. 354; Godenne 1957:
125–126, nr. LI–LIII;
De Borghgrave d'Altena
1959: 67; Roegiers 1969:
217–218, nr. 194; Crab
1977: 264–265, MS/8C,
455, MB/38; Vandebroeck
1994: 240, nr. 116, 251, nr.
175; De Nijn 1998: 56–57,
nr. 52; De Nijn 2000:
128–129, nr. 7.

Short title:

Garden with a Calvary

The central theme of this Mechelen Enclosed Garden is the concept of redemption symbolised by the crucifixion of Christ. The symmetrical structure of this example closely resembles that of the three largest cabinets (G1, G2 and G6). In the middle of this floral Garden, the crucified Christ is depicted with Mary and John standing on either side of the cross. At the foot of the cross lies a skull and a bone, referring to the remains of the first man, Adam. Since early Christianity, Christ was considered the second Adam, releasing humankind from the original sin imposed on them by their first ancestors.¹ To emphasise this connection, Christian tradition declares that the cross of Christ stood on the burial place of Adam, also known as Golgotha or Calvary. By placing this Holy Cross in a paradisiacal garden, the Enclosed Garden accentuates the possibility of salvation and the regaining of access to the lost paradise after the self-sacrifice of Christ.² The banderole at the bottom further underlines this thought by stating: ‘Christ died for us in great need on the mountain of Cavalry the most bitter death. And Jesus’ wounds are our mercy and deliver us of our crimes and sins.’³ On the closed gate, moreover, the five wounds of Christ are depicted.

Other than the Calvary group, this garden is filled with several pilgrim badges, relics with *cedulae* of beloved saints and holy places, jewellery, (lettered) sequins, coral pearls, *paperolles* and an incredible amount of colourful silk flora. The back of the wooden case is lined with once-glittering tinfoil similar to that used in the three largest Enclosed Gardens.

The *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* also includes painted wings on which four members of the Hospital of Our Lady are portrayed and identified, accompanied by their patron saints. When the case is open, the left wing depicts Peter van Steenwinckele, the first *rentmeester* (supervisor) of the hospital after its reform in December 1508, next to St Peter. The right wing depicts the first prioress after this reform, the Brussels’ Sister Cornelia Andries, alongside St Cornelius. When closed, the left wing shows the second *rentmeester* and Priest Marten Avonts kneeling next to St Martin of Tours. On the right wing Sister Jozijne Van Coolene is portrayed with St Judoc.

The depiction of the second *rentmeester* Marten Avonts suggests this Enclosed Garden was made after the death of the first *rentmeester*, Peter van Steenwinckele, in 1525. This is also confirmed by the small cross van Steenwinckele holds between his folded hands. Prioress Cornelia Andries died three years later in 1528. Therefore, this Enclosed Garden was probably made between 1525 and 1528.

The painted wings of this Enclosed Gardens were previously linked to the oeuvre of the Master of the Guild of St George.⁴ Although there is a certain stylistic resemblance, the relationship between the wings of the Enclosed Garden and other paintings ascribed to this master is indistinct.

¹ Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling, *The Book of Genesis in Late Antiquity: Encounters between Jewish and Christian Exegesis* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 71–79.

² For more information on the depiction of the Holy Cross in paradise, see: Barbara Baert, ‘Adam, Seth and Jerusalem. The Legend of the Wood of the Cross in

Medieval Literature and Iconography’, in *Adam, le premier homme* (Florence: Sislem, 2012), 69–99.

³ The original reads: ‘XPS is voor ons ghestorve(n) in grot(e) noot inden berch van Calvarie(n) die alder bitterste doot // IHS wonde(n) is ons gherade ende verlatenisse van onsen misdaden en(de) sonden.’

⁴ Catheline Périer-D’Ieteren, ‘Le Maître

de la Gilde de Saint Georges: Catalogue critique de cinq des panneaux de la “Légende de Saint Rombaut”, *Jaarboek Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen* (Antwerp: Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, 1975), 153–201; Idem, ‘Un tableau inédit du Maître de la Gilde de Saint Georges’, *Annales d’histoire de l’art et d’archéologie* vol. 32 (2010): 7–25.

Ill. 15 & Ill. 16 (detail on pages 32–33)

G3 – Enclosed Garden with a Calvary, the Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist, Mechelen
Portrait wings attributed to Master of the Guild of St George or his circle
Sculpture of crucified Christ signed with CORNIELIS

c. 1525-1528

108.8 × 144.5 × 23.5 cm

Museum Hof van Busleyden – Collection Sisters of the Hospital of Our Lady, inv. GHZ BH003

Provenance: On permanent loan from the Hospital of Our Lady, Mechelen





INRI

Dankt verghet dan epharian

Dan sint Jans ghebrent



Vand plaete d' omgird gabel ma' de boec

en vande ghebeet der n. meeghden

Fac. m. a. t. h. i. a. n.

Vand ta... g... op adt

Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne, Daniel in the Lions' Den and St Jerome

Bibliography:

Weale 1864: 15, nr. 148; Neeffs 1876: 273–274; Willocx 1895: 90–91; Anonymous 1911: 31, nr. 120; Poupeye 1912: 82–83; Godenne 1957: 123–125, nr. XLVII–L; De Borghgrave d'Altena 1959: 55; Crab 1977: 264, MS/8B, 457, MB/40; Vandebroeck 1994: 187; De Nijn 1998: 51, nr. 47; De Nijn 2000: 127, nr. 6; Frings 2005: 429–430, nr. 336.

Short title:

Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den

Although much smaller in size than the other Enclosed Gardens, the artistic quality of this sixteenth-century Garden is in no way inferior to the larger examples. The central scene depicts the Old Testament story of the prophet Daniel who, after remaining faithful to his forbidden faith, was thrown in a sealed den of lions by King Darius (Daniel 6). Carried by an angel, the prophet Habakkuk was able to provide Daniel with food without breaking the den's seal. When the lions' den was opened again, Daniel was found alive and well. The sculpted narrative of Daniel in the den is surrounded by two other groupings, the Virgin and Child with St Anne, and St Jerome. In contrast to the mostly wooden sculptures in the Enclosed Gardens, these figures are made of alabaster. The connection between the figures of Daniel, St Anne and St Jerome remains unclear. All three, however, received special veneration in the Hospital of Our Lady.

Other than these central figures, two small statues are attached on each side of the wooden box. On the left side, a male saint is dressed in a dark blue robe beneath a golden cloak. He also wears a dark blue hat. The position of his hands suggests he once held an attribute, perhaps a staff, scroll or sword. The female figure, who is standing opposite the unidentified male saint, also wears a dark blue dress and is veiled with a golden cloak. She doesn't seem to carry any attributes. This lack of attributes makes it difficult to pass final judgement on the identities of these saints.

In contrast to the other Mechelen Gardens, this paradisiacal garden is not enclosed by a gate. It is possible that it was removed over time, which might explain the small red velvet strip at the bottom of the case that could have served as a support, although it is also likely that there never was a fence.

In the background of this Garden we can distinguish two pipe-clay medallions, which feature Christ in profile and a Christ Child holding the attributes of the Passion. On the right of the Daniel sculpture, a small print depicting the Temptation of St Anthony can be distinguished.

Just as in the other Enclosed Gardens, this one is filled with wax seals (Agnus Dei), flowers and animals (a squirrel, a snail, spiders, birds) in silk, inscriptions, textiles, rolls of paper wrapped in textiles and small sequins. The Garden can be closed with two painted wings on which St Peter (left) and St John the Evangelist (right) are depicted.

1 These seals are not unique and were cast in pipe clay, wax and *papier-pressé*. For more information about the use of these medallions, see page 215. For more, different examples of the medallion featuring the same image of Christ in profile see: Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: The Image in Late Medieval Monastic Devotions* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 366–367, note 117; Christopher S. Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 155–164.

ILL. 17 & ILL. 18 (detail on pages 36–37)
**G4 – Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child
with St Anne, Daniel in the Lions’ Den and
St Jerome, Mechelen**
c. 1530

88 × 142 × 23.5 cm
Museum Hof van Busleyden – Collection Sisters
of the Hospital of Our Lady, inv. GHZ BH004
Provenance: On permanent loan from
the Hospital of Our Lady, Mechelen







Bibliography:

Weale 1864: 17, nr. 151; Neeffs 1876: 275–276, nr. 217; Willocx 1895: 92; Anonymous 1911: 32, nr. 123; Poupeye 1912: 84–85; De Borghgrave d'Altena 1959: 66; Crab 1977: 458, MB/42; Vandebroek 1994: 104; De Nijn 1998: 50, nr. 46; De Nijn 2000: 127, nr. 5.

Short title:

Garden with a Crucified Christ

The *Enclosed Garden with a Crucified Christ* (G5) has a less complex structure than the other Gardens from the collection of the Hospital of Our Lady. In the middle of the case is a small sculpture of the crucified Christ enclosed by numerous silk flowers. The top of the wooden case is decorated with five bunches of grapes representing the sacramental wine consumed during the Eucharist. The Holy Cross is flanked by a crescent moon (left) and a golden sun (right) with a glass heart in the middle. These two celestial bodies are in reference to the darkness that came over the world after the crucifixion of the Saviour. Between the artificial flowers and ripe fruits, a number of wrapped relics can be distinguished. These relics are said to have belonged to several saints (such as the eleven thousand virgins) and sacred sites (such as the Holy Land). At the bottom of the cross, a small golden gate closes the paradisiacal garden. Just as in the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3), this Garden alludes to Christian salvation and the newly regained access to the lost paradise after the crucifixion of Christ.

The middle of the case can be closed off with two painted wings. The left wing represents a Virgin and Child while St Augustine is depicted on the right wing. The choice of these two saintly figures is not surprising considering the shrine was held by a female community following the rule of St Augustine.

The small size of this Enclosed Garden suggests that this triptych might have been used for private devotion. This hypothesis is further supported by the small note that was added to the Garden by a sister called Victoria in 1806. In it she stipulates that she took the Garden from the personal cell of her fellow nun, Sister Benedict Meganck, after she had died. The note also indicates that she cleaned the small silk flowers.¹

This Enclosed Garden thus illustrates how these objects remained a vital part of the devotional life of the hospital sisters, not just in the sixteenth century, but also in the centuries that followed. By adding, removing, cleaning and replacing elements, the sisters kept these Gardens alive for the next generation to discover.

¹ The note reads: 'bij suster Victoria int jaar 1806 heb ik dit Capelleken [genom] en naer de / de dood van suster benedicta Meganck Van haer cel. [End]e alle de / bloomenkens daer uijt gehad en gekuijst en weer in ged[ae]n. In die / gebeentens en steenkens en hebbe ik geen briefven bij g[edae]n.' Freely translated: 'I Sister Victoria in the year of 1806 have taken this little chapel after the death of Sister Benedicta Meganck out of her cell. And [I] have taken out and cleaned all the flowers and have placed them back. I have not added any notes to the bones and stones.'

ILL. 19 & ILL. 20 (detail on pages 40–41)
G5 – Enclosed Garden with a Crucified Christ,
Mechelen
c. 1530
57.6 × 82.6 × 13.3 cm

Museum Hof van Busleyden – Collection Sisters
of the Hospital of Our Lady, inv. GHZ BH005
Provenance: On permanent loan from
the Hospital of Our Lady, Mechelen







Waa' (w) dert h...
was op den berch

Heere op af

method

Enclosed Garden with St Augustine, the Virgin and Child with St Anne and St Elisabeth

Bibliography:

Weale 1864: 17, nr. 152; Neeffs 1876: 276, nr. 218; Anonymous 1911: 33, nr. 124; Poupeye 1912: 79–81; Godenne 1957: 116–120, nr. XXXV–III–XXXV; De Borghgrave d'Altena 1959: 66; Crab 1977: 459–462, MB/43; Brokken 1990: 188–189, nr. 78; Van der Stock 1991: 447, nr. 212; Vandenbroeck 1994: 240, nr. 115; De Nijn 1998: 52–53, nr. 48; De Nijn 2000: 125–126, nr. 48; Antoine 2002: 55–56; Van der Stock 2016: 224–227, nr. 34.

Short title:

Garden with St Anne

This Enclosed Garden is the largest example in the Mechelen collection. It is similar in composition and form to the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2). A wooden case with two painted wings encloses an overwhelming amount of silk flowers intertwined with the lozenge pattern formed by the *paperolles*. Remarkably, this Enclosed Garden does not hold any relics or inscriptions in reference to saintly remnants.

The Augustinian hospital sisters cherished a devotion for all three saints represented by the *poupées de Malines* inside this cabinet. In the middle, St Anne is holding the Virgin Mary who in turn holds the Christ Child. This group, known as an *Anna Selbdritt*, was particularly meaningful to religious women as it emphasised the female genealogy of the Christ Child. The sculpture group, more importantly, illustrates the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, a theme that returns in the small sculpture of the Queen of Heaven at the top of the case. This Madonna, standing on a crescent moon and surrounded by an aureole and four angels, was also a reference to the apocalyptic woman of the Book of Revelation (Rev. 12:1–2). To the right of St Anne, St Elisabeth of Hungary is offering a coat to a disabled beggar while holding her attributes, a crown and a book. This saint received a special veneration in female religious communities engaged with the health care of the sick and poor. A sculpture of St Augustine is placed to the left of St Anne. Dressed as a bishop, he is holding his ‘burning’ heart, a gesture in reference to his *Confessiones*. A colourful *papier-pressé* medallion has also been incorporated into the mixed-media ensemble. Analogous to the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1), the medallion represents a mystical hunt taking place inside a walled garden.

On the right wing of the triptych St Jerome is depicted penitent, holding a stone in his hand to beat against his breast. He is surrounded by his conventional attributes: a lion, a cardinal’s hat and cloak, and a crucifixion. The left wing shows St Catherine trampling a wheel. At her feet, two sisters of the Hospital of Our Lady are portrayed. Technical analyses have revealed that these figures were added at a later time. Could these women be identified as Catharina van den Schriek and Margriet van den Schriek, the late sixteenth-century prioress and subprioress of the convent? In that case, the superiors of the Hospital of Our Lady immortalised themselves in a similar fashion as their predecessors on the painted wings of the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3).

ILL. 21 & ILL. 22 (detail on pages 44–45)

G6 – Enclosed Garden with St Augustine, the Virgin and Child with St Anne and St Elisabeth,
Mechelen
c. 1510-1530

147.5 × 208.3 × 37.8 cm

Museum Hof van Busleyden – Collection Sisters
of the Hospital of Our Lady, inv. GHZ BH006
Provenance: On permanent loan from
the Hospital of Our Lady, Mechelen







Bibliography:

Weale 1864: 17–18, nr. 153; Neeffs 1876: 276–277, nr. 219; Willocx 1895: 92–93; Anonymous 1911: 30, nr. 116; Poupeye 1912: 85; Vandenbroeck 1994: 199; De Nijn 1998: 54, nr. 50.

Short title:

Garden with a Madonna

The *Enclosed Garden with a Madonna* (G7) is somewhat different in composition and function from the other six cabinets. In the centre of this Enclosed Garden is a small statuette of the Virgin Mary crowned with flowers, pearls and gold. In her arms, she holds the Christ Child and a golden sceptre. The statuette is placed on a pedestal in a niche embellished with flowers made with silver and gold thread and numerous sequins. The shape of the niche resembles the architectural framework of an altarpiece. The whole is surrounded by ten relic medallions to which several holy remains are attached. They are accompanied by inscriptions identifying the remnants as belonging to saints and sacred places. Some of these inscriptions were printed instead of handwritten, which suggests they might have been replaced or added later.

In contrast to the other Gardens, this case is not a reflection of a lost paradise. There are no pilgrim badges, wax seals (*Agnus Dei*) or *paperolles* in the triptych. In this cabinet the display of relics prevails over the garden narrative. Furthermore, the flowers that adorn this shrine were not made by wrapping silk thread around a metal wire and parchment leaf structure, but cut out of paper. These remarkable differences in arrangement and technique suggest this Garden was made several decades after the other Mechelen examples.

The only indication of time regarding the production of the work can be found on the painted wings of the shrine. The left wing represents a Pietà – a depiction of the mourning Mary holding the dead Christ in her lap. The right wing shows the portrait of a yet-to-be identified older man with his hands folded in prayer. The figure is kneeling in front of a prayer desk on which a coat of arms is painted. In the open book before him a date is written, although the numbers have faded over time. James Weale read the inscription as *AVXILIV MEV IN DNO 1539*, but the fashionable collar of the figure stems rather from the second half of the sixteenth century. This later date is also in keeping with the centre of the mixed-media cabinet.

ILL. 23 & ILL. 24 (detail on pages 48–49)
G7 – Enclosed Garden with a Madonna, Mechelen
c. 1539–1700 (?)
51 × 69.1 × 11.5 cm

Museum Hof van Busleyden – Collection Sisters
of the Hospital of Our Lady, inv. GHZ BH007
Provenance: On permanent loan from
the Hospital of Our Lady, Mechelen





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torio.

De lio au
gustino

BARBARA

S. M. MAGDALENA S. ELISA BETHA





CONTEXT

The seven Enclosed Gardens were created in the first half of the sixteenth century and, so far as we know, they never left the Hospital of Our Lady. The Gardens are silent witnesses to Mechelen's rich past, which can still be felt in the streets and squares and in beautiful city palaces such as the Hof van Busleyden, where they are now displayed.

Mechelen in the Sixteenth Century

WIM HÜSKEN

INTRODUCTION

As far as we know, the Mechelen Enclosed Gardens have never left the Hospital of Our Lady (Onze-Lieve-Vrouwegasthuis) at any time since they were first created.¹ Their survival is due to the fascinating political and cultural history of the city of Mechelen, and the special position enjoyed by the hospital sisters in that history over the centuries.

Roughly two centuries after the Gardens' creation, on 1 October 1795, the Austrian Netherlands were officially annexed by the French Republic. Anticlerical legislation came into force in the Southern Provinces; the decree of 1 September 1796 ordered the dissolution of all monastic orders.² Possessions held by the religious institutions – church silverware, books, manuscripts, paintings, and so forth – were thenceforth to come under the control of the *Direction des Domaines nationaux*, the commissioners of which had to draw up an inventory in the presence of the clergy themselves.³ Given that the hospital sisters' duties involved caring for the sick, they were not initially subject to that decree.⁴ However, a few months after the French invasion, the hospital sisters were compelled nevertheless to cede control of their possessions to a Relief Committee in the City of Mechelen.⁵ Most of these possessions became the property of the Civil Almshouses and, after 1925, the Committee for Public Poor Relief (COO), the predecessor to the Public Centre for Social Welfare (OCMW). Until the mid-nineteenth century the Enclosed Gardens were held at the convent of the Augustinian nuns in Onze-Lieve-Vrouwstraat.

The Royal Decree of 19 June 1845 provided for the construction of a new hospital and adjoining convent on the site of the former Jesuit monastery in Keizerstraat. King Leopold I laid the first stone on 3 July 1854. Three years later, in the autumn of 1857, the new building was completed and the sisters moved with their possessions into their new accommodation. The Enclosed Gardens were placed in the mother superior's room, together with some old cabinets, paintings and sculptures. The *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) was placed in a separate location, namely 'in a cabinet in the corridor'.⁶ On 1 November 1999, an official end was brought to the Enclosed Gardens' stay at the convent, when the hospital sisters handed them to the City of Mechelen on a long-term loan. Ownership of the Enclosed Gardens and of the rest of the hospital sisters' (art) heritage was transferred in 2016 to the De Beata Vita Foundation.⁷

THE HOSPITAL SISTERS OF MECHELEN

In around 1900, Mechelen's hospital sisters were directed by Cardinal Goosens of the Archdiocese of Mechelen to furnish before 1 May 1901 a description of the history of the convent and adjoining hospital (Ill. 26). The result was a handwritten manuscript, still in the nuns' safekeeping, known as the *Monographie*.⁸ As far as its authors were concerned, there was no doubt at all about the date when the hospital in Mechelen had been founded. It was clearly stated in a charter dating from 1220 that an almshouse was founded in Mechelen while Bishop Albertus of Liège was in charge: *Dominus*



*Albertus, Leodiensis episcopus, quartam partem bonarii allodii episcopalis super qua domus pauperum constructa est.*⁹ Knowing that Albertus was ordained as bishop in January 1196 and died on 1 February 1200, the Hospital's founding must have taken place between those two dates. It was from two documents that the authors of the *Monographie* inferred that Albertus of Liège was never afforded the honour of having personally founded the hospital. The aforementioned charter of 1220 named Ratuardus de Dilia and his wife Oda as the donors of a generous gift to the 'hospitale Beate Marie in Machlinia',¹⁰ while ten years later in the hospital's articles of association, compiled by Bishop Godefrius de Condé of Cambrai, Walter Berthout III was named as the actual founder.¹¹

However, the history of the hospital's birth is not as clear-cut as the compilers of the *Monographie* would have had us believe. In the charter of 1220 cited above, two matters are linked together without their having necessarily occurred in the same year: the donation of a plot of land and the founding of an almshouse. Contributors to the exhibition catalogue published to mark the hospital's 800th anniversary (1998) considered the year 1198 to be the start of the hospital sisters' work in Mechelen. However, by analogy to the founding of the Sint-Jansgasthuis (hospital) in Brussels, they believed that a later founding date was also possible: 'Perhaps the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwegasthuis in Mechelen also grew out of a local initiative, founded on land from the territorial lord.'¹²

III. 26
The Onze-Lieve-Vrouwegasthuis (Hospital of Our Lady) from 1250 to 1567. Mechelen City Archives, Collection Schoeffer, Sch. 302



During the first centuries of its existence, the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwegasthuis would certainly have had works of art in its possession, chiefly of a religious nature. Sculptures of saints, particularly those of the two patron saints St Augustine and St Elisabeth of Thuringia, would not have been absent, but prior to the creation of the Enclosed Gardens we know nothing for certain about them.

THE COURT OF MECHELEN AND ITS INFLUENCE

The period in which the Enclosed Gardens were brought into being is among the most compelling in Mechelen's history. As that period dawned, Margaret of

Austria (1480-1530) was still living in the city as regent of the Netherlands. In 1507, following the early death of her brother Philip I of Castile (1478-1506), she opened up her palace on Keizerstraat to his children. Later, in the spring of 1526, the three surviving children of Margaret's niece Isabella of Austria (1501-1526) joined their great-aunt in Mechelen to be raised at her court (Ill. 27). Margaret died on 1 December 1530 and her successor, Mary of Hungary (1505-1558), decided shortly after 5 July 1531, the date of her official inauguration as regent, to move to Brussels and reside at the former court of the dukes of Brabant at the Palace of Coudenberg. This brought a definitive end to Mechelen's central political function as the capital of the Netherlands and the regent's residence. Throughout the six months immediately prior to this, the regency had been held temporarily by Jan Carondelet II and Antoon van Lalaing II, two prominent members of the Great Council, the latter also being Stadtholder of Holland, Zeeland and West Friesland.¹⁵

The population of Mechelen experienced a period of sharp growth during the first thirty years of the sixteenth century.¹⁴ The production of luxury goods and the presence of the court of Margaret of Austria and of the Great Council brought wealthy incomers to the city. That growth saw a reversal after 1530, slowing ultimately to a halt. As time progressed, it was Antwerp that attracted ever greater numbers of skilled craftsmen. Increasing economic and religious unrest, the struggle against Spanish rule, and sympathy for the rebels until 1585 caused Mechelen's population to drop to 11,000 by the close of the century.¹⁵

THE SEIGNORY OF MECHELEN 'HEERLIJKHEID MECHELEN'

In the early sixteenth century, Mechelen acted as a magnet to an upper echelon of lawyers, clergy and artists who had come to the city on the coat-tails of Margaret of Austria or

who had been appointed by the Great Council. In Mechelen, they sought out prestigious mansions, and as a result the city underwent an architectural transformation. New and imposing structures arose everywhere, such as the home of Hiëronymus van Busleyden (c. 1470–1517), the famous humanist, statesman and patron, who, under the terms of his will, took the initiative to found the Collegium Trilingue at the University of Leuven. In 1504, he had his ample residence built in what was then Koestraat (the present-day Frederik de Merodestraat) by descendants of the celebrated Keldermans family of master builders, who also drafted the plans. Between 1517 and 1527, Antoon van Lalaing I, Count van Hoogstraten, had a spacious residence built close to the Zandpoort ('Sand Gate'). As early as 1476, Jan Carondelet I, the chairman of the Parliament of Mechelen, built an elegant home, which was called the 'Court of Palermo' after his son Jan, the Archbishop of Palermo. The same period, between 1477 and 1482, also saw the construction on Keizerstraat of the Court of Cambrai (Hof van Kamerijk), the residence of Margaret of York (1446-1503), who had also settled in Mechelen following the death of her husband, Charles the Bold.¹⁶ After 1507, the city purchased a number of dwellings opposite this building for the purpose of executing a comparable project: a palace for Margaret of Austria. At the time of her death in 1530, this building, known as the Court of Savoy, was still unfinished.¹⁷

The wealthy professional guilds and trades also made their architectural presence felt. Between 1530 and 1535 the guild of fishmongers built impressive premises alongside the River Dyle, which subsequently acquired the name 'De Zalm' ('The Salmon'). It was one of the first buildings in the Netherlands to include a Renaissance façade (which was magnificently restored between 2015 and 2017). Mechelen's most important chamber of rhetoric – De Peoene – was not to be outdone and, on 16 March 1472, it purchased the house

ILL. 27

Studio of Bernard van Orley, *Portrait of Margaret of Austria as a widow*, c. 1518. Bourg-en-Bresse, Monastère Royale de Brou, inv. 975, 16 AB

‘In den Horen’ close to Grote Markt. In around 1549, the rhetoricians beautified the façade in the Renaissance style so that it could compete with the fishmongers’ building.¹⁸

The choice of Mechelen on the part of, first, Margaret of York and, later, Margaret of Austria owed itself to the fact that the relatively small lordship (*heerlijkheid*) of Mechelen, which also extended to include the surrounding villages and the territory of Heist-op-den-Berg, enjoyed an independent status as a former fief from the Prince-Bishop of Liège. The close relationship with the dukes of Burgundy dated back more than a century. Through the marriage in 1369 of Margaret III, Countess of Flanders, (1350-1405) to Philip the Bold (1342-1404), the duke became Count of Flanders on the death of his father-in-law, Louis II, Count of Flanders. At that time, Mechelen was also part of the County of Flanders, whereby Philip was able to style himself Lord of Mechelen as well. The city’s central location would also have had a part to play in Charles the Bold’s decision in 1473 to concentrate ‘virtually all important functions relating to core decision-making in the Netherlands’ in Mechelen.¹⁹

However, the decision by Margaret of York to adopt Mechelen as her place of residence was prompted by the fact that she had complete control over the territory of the lordship. This had been arranged in 1467 under the terms of her contract of marriage to Charles the Bold. In that contract, it was stipulated that Mechelen and other towns and villages were to be dowered to her.²⁰ As regards Margaret of Austria, there were probably various reasons for her choosing Mechelen in 1507 as her place of residence. In Margaret’s case, she had *not* stood to inherit the lordship from her husband. The fact that she had been brought up as a young woman – from the age of thirteen to seventeen – at the court of her step-grandmother Margaret of York is generally felt to have played an important part in her decision to settle in Mechelen.²¹ It was only in 1519 that, following his election as Holy Roman Emperor and as a token of gratitude for her efforts in that election, Margaret’s nephew Charles V (1500-1558) granted her title to the lordship and everything attaching to it for the rest of her life.²²

Alongside the residential function of the city of Mechelen, the fact that the Great Council had its seat there was also a contributing factor to the

upturn in the city’s fortunes in the early sixteenth century. This council, the highest legal body in the Netherlands, was established on 22 January 1504 by Philip I of Castile as the successor to the Parliament of Mechelen (1473-77). The Council consisted of nineteen members (the chairman, four clerks and fourteen councillors), all of whom were lawyers,²³ which resulted in a modest but not insignificant increase in the wealthy residents of the city. This aristocratic clique probably did not go unnoticed in everyday life (Ill. 28).

MECHELEN AT THE TIME OF THE REFORMATION

Even in the second half of the sixteenth century, and in part thanks to its central geographical location, Mechelen continued to be one of those places where government, religious and social institutions chose to settle.

The church reforms of 1559, in which two new archdioceses were founded – Utrecht in the north and Mechelen in the south – once again brought an institution of note to the city. The first bishop was appointed on 27 November 1561: Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle (1517-1586).

In around 1500, the city and outlying towns and villages housed the monasteries, convents and refuges (the latter within the safety of the ramparts) of various religious orders: Cistercian monks and nuns, Carmelite monks and nuns, Augustinian recluses, Poor Clares, Franciscans, Dominicans, Cellite or Alexian monks and nuns, Canonesses Regular of St Augustine of the Order of St Victor and of the Congregation of Windesheim (in the convents of Bethanië and Thabor), Norbertine monks and nuns... Most of these Mechelen religious institutions were spared the ravages of the iconoclasts in 1566.

Nevertheless, field preaching outside the city walls attracted large numbers of Mechelen’s residents. In 1566, between 1,500 and 3,000 residents are said to have attended sermons given by a Lutheran or Calvinist preacher – the city had one minister of each persuasion.²⁴ In 1580, the Calvinist regime seized St Rumbold’s Cathedral, the Church of Our Lady-on-the-Dyle and the Church of St Peter and St Paul for their own religious services.²⁵ The other churches, Sint-Janskerk and Sint-Kateli-



LA PEINTURE, CY DEVERS 1504, REPRESENTE LE GRAND COUNSEL, INSTUÉ A MALINES PAR L'ARCHIDUC PHILIPPE LE BEL, LE 23 DE 1010 DE JANVIER, DE L'AN 1504, ES 1504 SUIVANT: GONDONNONS QUE LE DIT GRAND COUNSEL, AUQUEL L'AURA 14 CONSELLIERS A SAVOIR: J D'EGLE RE, ET 9 LAÏCS, ET UN PRESIDENT, QUI PRESIDERA EN L'ABSENCE DE SON CHANCELLIER, C'EST-À-DIRE 4. 1000 DES REGENTES DE SON HUYER, MES AUCUNES REGENTES AU DIT COUNSEL, ET SES MARS SUIVANT: AVECQ SON DIT CHANCELLIER, LE HUYERAR D'ARKAN, LE DOME FRENCHOT D'UTRECHT, ET MESSIEURS, DE FLAINE, ET TOUSMONT INTENDANT, PIERRE DES RECHUTES COMME LES AUTRES, ET ENNA TOUT UN COLLEGE D'ÉLÈVES, LE MESSIEURS D'ÉTAT PARLEMENT, A JEAN VINCENT, RICHARD DE LA CHAPELLE, JEAN C'ARONELLE, G. GEORGE DE THOUSSIER, 7. JEAN DE BOURBON, L'AYDEN CONSELLIER, BARRILLER, ARTHEUSE, G. GEBARDE DE PLANS, 9. CHANCELER DE BANGHOUCHE, TRÉSORIER, JEAN DE 10. JONNE AINSY, VON BELLEFONTE, 11. E. DES 1000 1000, 12. ROBERT DE THORAKKOR, 13. CHEVALIER, THOMAS DE LA FAYHIE, 14. F. DE LICHANE, 15. J. HUKERT, 16. T. LAUFENBUR, 17. VAN DEN DUNDE, 18. C. LA CHAP, 19. JEAN GILLET, 20. JEAN HONSTRUBER, 21. JEAN VAN DER WERDTEN, COMMISSAIRE, HONORAIRE, HONORAIRE, HONORAIRE.

jnekerk, were closed and nailed shut, but not before they had been extensively looted, the altars and stained-glass windows smashed to pieces, and the bells melted down to reuse the bronze.

The Eighty Years War (1568-1648) did not leave Mechelen unscathed. In the first weeks of October 1572, Mechelen's inhabitants were severely punished for the hospitality they had shown to the troops led by William I, Prince of Orange. On 29 August they had opened the city gates to the opponents of Spanish rule. Between 2 and 5 October, troops under Don Fadrique, the son of the Duke of Alba, took to the streets on a four-day spree of looting and slaughter. The events of those days are now known as the Spanish Fury.

In 1578, during the occupation of the city by supporters of William of Orange, a few of the

monasteries outside the city were destroyed on his orders. Ten years later, the Calvinist regime in Mechelen commanded that the remaining monasteries should also be demolished, with the exception of those monasteries and convents responsible for tending to the sick.²⁶ The convent and hospital of the Augustinian nuns was also subjected to looting. However, in a comprehensive report on what was seized from the sisters, nowhere is there any mention of the Enclosed Gardens. Had they been sent into safekeeping just in time? The Mechelen historian Gerardus-Dominicus de Azevedo Coutinho y Bernal catalogued in detail what the Spanish governor's forces had taken with them; however, he did so without naming the Gardens.²⁷ The church in Leliëndael, where an Enclosed Garden had been held, was less fortunate. The church was

III. 28

Inauguration of the Great Council in 1504. Mechelen City Archives, Iconography, inv. C8478

shamelessly looted: 'Item our tableau from our workhouse or spinning room, in the midst of which the Holy Cross and relics, furnished in silk and other decorations, has been entirely removed, and the cabinet left standing'.²⁸

A few years later, on 9 April 1580, the city came under renewed assault, this time by English and Scottish mercenaries, together with troops from Brussels. This so-called English Fury targeted one of the few cities in the south to have remained Catholic, its aim being to force the city by violence to join forces with the Dutch Revolt. The supporters of William of Orange remained in control for five years. It was only in July 1585 that the Calvinist regime was brought to an end in the city.

The hospital sisters were not spared during the English Fury either. However, the *Monographie* is rather succinct about this: 'During the Dutch troubles 1580-1585, the churchyard, the church and the altars in the hospital were profaned by the *geuzen* (beggars) [adversaries of the Spanish regime]. This is apparent from the *acta Reverendissimi Domini Hauchini XI Augusti 1585 in hospitali*.'²⁹

ART AND ARTISTIC CRAFTSMANSHIP

'In the past Mechelen has enjoyed many admirers of the art of painting, such that at one time you might have encountered there 150 merchants of paintings.'³⁰ So wrote the Italian Ludovico Guicciardini in the Dutch translation of his *Descrittione di tutti i Paesi Bassi, altrimenti detti Germania inferiore*. Although some researchers contend that he grossly exaggerated the estimated number of painters' studios in Mechelen, Hans J. Van Miegroet believes that there were, in fact, many more. As regards the period between 1540 and 1680, he has counted as many as 1,473 studios. He has estimated the annual production of Antwerp and Mechelen combined at 10,000 to 15,000 paintings, originating chiefly in Mechelen.³¹ Consequently, we know the names of numerous fifteenth- and sixteenth-century painters from Mechelen, but 500 years later the majority have left none of their work to posterity or, at least, none that can be attributed to them. Famous names include, of course, the 'Flemish Raphael' Michiel Coxcie (1499-1592) and the brothers Jan and Frans Verbeeck (both c. 1510-1570). In the city's

fifteenth-century accounts we come across numerous names of painters who were commissioned by the city: Jan Schoonjans, Jacob den Drayere, Jan Vortmans, Anthonius Mickaert... Despite commendable attempts in the past to create an inventory of these otherwise unknown artisans, Mechelen painting of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries remains relatively unknown.³²

During the sixteenth century, the inspiration for sculpture was almost entirely religious in nature. Secular sculpture barely existed.³³ Alabaster carvers would occasionally produce bas-reliefs of mythological or allegorical scenes.³⁴ In addition to alabaster, Mechelen was chiefly known for what are termed its *poupées de Malines* ('Mechelen dolls'), some of the best examples of which can be seen in the Enclosed Gardens. Just as in the case of the alabaster bas-reliefs, these creations involved mass production. Production of these statuettes took place between approximately 1510 and 1625.³⁵ Over the course of time the statuettes became larger, increasing from 30-45 cm in height in the first few decades to 60-85 cm in the second and third quarter of the century.³⁶ The popularity of statuettes of this type owed itself in large part to their recognisability. The Marian figurines in particular betray constantly recurring characteristics: the *contrapposto* attitude, a headdress elaborated in detail, and V-shaped pleats in the robes at the waist. A sizeable percentage of production was intended for export. It is no accident that so many of Western Europe's museums house *poupées de Malines* and Mechelen alabaster bas-reliefs with their distinctive dimensions (c. 8 × 12 cm) and papier-mâché frames. The same applies to Mechelen canons, bells and mortars. Prominent families of craftsmen in those fields included the Waghevens, Vanden Gheins and De Clercks. Mechelen bells can be found in collections ranging from Denmark to Italy and from Great Britain to Poland.³⁷

Archival sources on the production of lace are scarcer in the sixteenth century than they are in the seventeenth. Nevertheless, this type of craftsmanship must have been quite widespread in Mechelen at the time. It was the Beguines who were particularly active in that sphere. In fact, 'Mechlin lace' is the most complex of its kind; it does not employ any pins and the 'ice ground' (the underlying pattern on which decorations and depictions were applied) is not square – as in Bruges

and Brussels lace – but hexagonal and thus exhibits a more complex honeycomb structure.

Written sources for the production of *cuir de Cordoue* (gilded leather) are also encountered only at the beginning of the seventeenth century. It was also a product prioritised for export. People came to Mechelen from far and wide to buy *cuir de Cordoue*, which was used to clad the walls of the most important rooms in patrician houses or other prestigious buildings.

CONCLUSION

In the course of the sixteenth century, Mechelen lost its privileged status as the seat of the regent, when

Mary of Hungary moved her court to the Coudenberg Palace in Brussels. Owing to the creation of the Archdiocese of Mechelen, the city continued to receive an influx of wealthy and aristocratic people. The Augustinian hospital sisters carried on their duties at the hospital in tending to the sick, and even in the French period they were able to retain a certain degree of independence, while other religious institutions had to close their doors. As far as we know, the seven Enclosed Gardens always remained in the convent. We do not know whether the sisters hid them away from the avaricious French occupiers at the end of the eighteenth century; whatever the case, the Gardens managed to survive that troubled period. They are silent witnesses to the richness of Mechelen's past, a past still tangibly present in the city's streets and squares, in its stately mansions, such as the Hof van Busleyden, and in its eight historic churches with their art treasures.³⁸

1 For a detailed history of the Hospital of the Augustinian sisters in Mechelen, see: Heide De Nijn et al., ed., *800 jaar Onze-Lieve-Vrouwegasthuis. Uit het erfgoed van de Mechelse gasthuiszusters en het OCMW*, exhib. cat. (Mechelen: Stedelijk Museum, 1998).

2 J.B. Duvergier, *Collection complète des lois, décrets, ordonnances, réglemens et avis du conseil-d'état*, vol. IX (Paris, 1825), 190: 'Les ordres et congrégations réguliers, monastères, abbayes, prieurés, chanoines réguliers, chanoinesses, et généralement toutes les maisons ou établissements religieux de l'un et de l'autre sexe, sont supprimés dans les départements réunis par la loi du 9 vendémiaire dernier, ainsi que sur l'ancien territoire de la République.'

3 'Immédiatement après la publication de la présente loi, la direction des domaines nationaux établie dans lesdits départements, nommera des commissaires pris dans son sein ou en dehors, qui se transporteront dans lesdits établissements, s'y feront représenter tous les registres et comptes de régie, les arrêteront, [...] dresseront sur papier libre et sans frais, un état et description sommaire de l'argenterie des églises et chapelles, effets de la sacristie, bibliothèques, livres, manuscrits, médailles et tableaux, en présence des religieux ou religieuses.' (ibid.).

4 'Sont exceptées des dispositions de la présente loi, les maisons de religieuses dont l'institut même a pour objet l'éducation publique ou le soulagement des malades, et qui, à cet effet, tiennent réellement, en dehors, des écoles ou des salles de malades ; lesquelles maisons continueront, comme par le passé, d'administrer les biens dont elles jouissent.' (ibid., 191)

5 'De municipaliteyt zend u den arrêté van de administratie centrale met de tabellen daerin beroepen: zij beveelt u van denzelven, voor zoo vele u aengaet, op het spoedigste te agtervolgen en de tabellen te vervullen, mitsgaeders van dezelfde, vervult zijnde, tydelyk en zoo haest mogelyk op den Bureau van Bystand te bestellen, alwaer u recipissé zal verleend worden. Mechelen 8 Pluvios[e], 3 jaer der Republiek.', From the warrant of seizure issued by the municipal authorities, signed by A.J. Van Diest and cited in the hospital sisters' *Monographie*, see note 8.

6 *Monographie*, 115–116, see note 8.

7 Representatives of the last still living

Augustinian hospital sisters now reside peacefully in the De Beata Vita Foundation.

8 Archive of the Archdiocese of Mechelen, Parish and monastic monographs written by hand: Onze-Lieve-Vrouwegasthuis Mechelen, c. 1901. The monograph kept by the sisters is a copy.

9 *Monographie*, 2.

10 *Ibid.*

11 'Godefridus, Dei gratia Cameracensis episcopus, ... in hospitali Beate Marie Magliniensis nobilis viri Walteri Bertholdi munificentia et devotione fundatum, et de fidelum eleemosinis est edificatum.' (*Ibid.*, 3)

12 Jaak Ockeley, 'Het Onze-Lieve-Vrouwegasthuis te Mechelen van de stichting tot het begin van de 19de eeuw', in De Nijn et al., *800 jaar Onze-Lieve-Vrouwegasthuis*, 7–23 and, in particular, 8.

13 Wil Fries, 'Maria, regentes over de Nederlanden. 1. De strop om de hals', in *Maria van Hongarije. Koningin tussen keizers en kunstenaars, 1505–1558*, eds. Bob van den Boogert and Jacqueline Kerkhoff, exhib. cat. (Zwolle: Waanders, 1993), 118–126.

14 Raymond Van Uytven, ed., *De geschiedenis van Mechelen: van heerlijkheid tot stadsgewest* (Tiel: Lannoo, 1991), 83.

15 *Ibid.*

16 With regard to the genesis of the palaces of Margaret of York and Margaret of Austria, see: Krista De Jonge, 'De voornaamste residenties in Mechelen. Het Hof van Kamerijk en het Hof van Savoyen', in *Dames met Klasse. Margareta van York, Margareta van Oostenrijk*, Dagmar Eichberger, ed., exhib. cat. (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2005), 57–66.

17 *Ibid.*, 61. With regard to the construction history of the Court of Savoy (Hof van Savoye), see in particular Dagmar Eichberger, *Leben mit Kunst, Wirken durch Kunst. Sammelwesen und Hofkunst unter Margarete von Österreich, Regentin der Niederlande* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 55–92.

18 Eugeen Van Autenboer, *Volksfeesten en rederijkers te Mechelen (1400–1600)*, (Ghent: Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Taal- en Letterkunde, 1962), 112 and 115.

19 Walter Prevenier, 'Mechelen rond 1500. Een kosmopolitische biotoop voor elites en non-conformisten', in Dagmar Eichberger, ed., *Dames met klasse*, 32. See also Wim Hüsken, 'De Grote Raad: moord,

woordbreuk en andere schandalen. Naar aanleiding van de tentoonstelling in het Mechelse Schepenhuis', in *Hoge rechtspraak in de oude Nederlanden*, Hugo de Schepper and René Vermeir, eds. (Publications by the Vlaams-Nederlandse Vereniging voor Nieuwe Geschiedenis, 5), (Maastricht: Shaker, 2006), 53. See also: Th.L. Maes, *Het Parlement en de Grote Raad van Mechelen 1473–1797* (Antwerp: De Vries-Brouwers, 2009), in particular, Chapter 3.1: 'Waarom werd Mechelen verkozen?', 42–49.

20 Henri Installé, 'Vrijwaring van rechten. Vrouwe van Mechelen', in *De Grote Raad. Moord, woordbreuk en andere schandalen*, Wim Hüsken, ed., exhib. cat. (Mechelen: Stedelijke Musea, 2004), 48–51.

21 Moreover, Margaret of Austria resided at the court of Margaret of York as a child from March 1482 until April 1483, and also as the widow of John, Prince of Asturias, from January 1500 until October 1501. See Dagmar Eichberger, 'Margareta van Oostenrijk. Een prinses met politiek in zicht en gezag', in Dagmar Eichberger, ed., *Dames met klasse*, 51.

22 P.C. Molhuysen and P.J. Blok, eds., *Nieuw Nederlandsch Biographisch Woordenboek*, vol. VIII (Leiden, 1930), 1120.

23 Maes, *Het Parlement en de Grote Raad van Mechelen*, 76.

24 *Ibid.*, 245.

25 Despite the removal from these churches of everything that referred to the Catholic religion, these buildings were well maintained throughout the Calvinists' five-year rule. See Eugeen Van Autenboer, 'Mechelen in de 16de eeuw: Schade wordt toegebracht en hersteld', *Handelingen van de Koninklijke Kring voor Oudheidkunde, Letteren en Kunst van Mechelen* 89 (1985), 212, 218 and 221.

26 *Ibid.*, 205–206.

27 'Item op de camere, die boven staet, daer Moeder en Medemoeder slapen, seven opperste rocken, ende ses koersen, dry laeken sargien. Item twee doesynen hemden, twee doesynen voorschoden, ende vier doesynen doecken, ende vier tresoirs kandelers iiij. Lynen, een half dosyn coussen ende vier huycken', in [Gerardus Dominicus de Azevedo Coutinho y Bernal], *Korte Chronycke van vele gedenckweerdige geschiedenissen soo in de principale Steden van het Hertoghdom van Brabant als in de Stadt ende Provincie van Mechelen*, vol. 5 (Leuven, 1747), 309.

28 Hannah Iterbeke, 'Cultivating Devotion: The Sixteenth-Century Enclosed Gardens of the Low Countries', *IKON* 10 (2017): 243 (footnote 40).

29 *Monographie*, 18–19.

30 Lowijs Guicciardini, *Beschryvinghe van alle de Neder-landen, anderssins ghenoeemt Neder-Dvytslandt* (Amsterdam, 1612), 134.

31 Hans J. Van Miegroet, 'Goedkoop en veel. Een nieuw beeld van de Mechelse kunstexport in de zestiende en zeventiende eeuw', in *Uw toren is niet af: bouw mee aan het museum*, exhib. cat. (Mechelen: Stedelijke Musea Mechelen, 2014), 102–103.

32 Emmanuel Neeffs, *Histoire de la peinture et de la sculpture à Malines*, vol. I (Ghent, 1876), 257–334.

33 In Mechelen, the sculptor Conrat Meit (1470/80–1550/51), who came from Worms and worked at the court of Margaret of Austria, produced portrait busts of Charles V as well as of Philibert II, Duke of Savoy, and Margaret.

34 See, among others, Guy Bès de Berc, *Sculptures d'albâtre de Malines: Les reliefs de dévotion, fin XVIème début XVIIème siècle* (Saint-Armel: Guy Bès de Berc, 2003), 209–227.

35 Jaak Jansen, 'Mechelse rondsculptuur in hout tijdens de Renaissance: de studie van twee modellen', in *Het Mechelse meubel 1500–2000. Van houtsnijwerk tot design*, vol. 3, *Mechels houtsnijwerk in de eeuw van keizer Karel*, Heidi De Nijn, ed., exhib. cat. (Mechelen: Stedelijke Musea, 2000), 18.

36 *Ibid.*, 19.

37 Marc Van Bets and Karine Van Bets-Decoster, *De Mechelse klokkengieters, 14de–18de eeuw* (Mechelen: Koninklijke Beiaardschool, 1998).

38 I should like to extend my thanks to Willy Van de Vijver, chief archivist of the Mechelen City Archives, who provided so many useful remarks and addendums in respect of an earlier version of this essay.

III. 29

Patacon with Christ Child in polychrome pipe clay – Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den



IN NOMINE DOMINI AMEN
IN NOMINE DOMINI AMEN
IN NOMINE DOMINI AMEN
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The Hospital of Our Lady in Mechelen

BART STROOBANTS

III. 30

St Catherine –
Garden with St Ursula

It was around 1198 that several of Mechelen's citizens founded the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwegasthuis (Hospital of Our Lady). Subsequently, on 8 April 1230, statutes and a rule of life were drawn up for the seven sisters and five brothers attached to the institution. During the first few centuries of its existence, both women and men took responsibility for nursing at the hospital. However, the brothers were excluded around 1400, after which the sisters took on sole responsibility. After all, chastity could be under question in a mixed-sex community.

Nursing thrived at the hospital, resulting in a considerable increase in income. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Mechelen's town council tried on several occasions to gain control over that income. To counter such meddling, the hospital was able to rely not only on the support of various popes, but also on the protection of the Burgundian-Habsburg rulers: Philip the Good in 1466, Charles the Bold in 1468 and Maximilian I, the Holy Roman Emperor, in 1476.

The medieval Hospital of Our Lady had been built on a site positioned against the first city wall at the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwepoort (Our Lady's Gate). However, following construction of the city's second wall between 1264 and 1268, the location became part of the city centre. In addition to the convent building and hospital wards, there was probably also a farmhouse on the site. Naturally enough, a hospital would have needed to be self-sufficient. Waste water would have been discharged straight into the Dyle river, which ran alongside the hospital.

At the end of the fifteenth century, little was left of the hospital sisters' pious and noble goal in respect of tending to the sick. The life of the convent had gradually evolved to become a care institution where laypeople were in charge of caring for the ill. These laypeople were in the pay of the sisters, who by then were enjoying a peaceful and comfortable existence. At the time, only seven nuns were still attached to the hospital. In 1500, there was a visitation by Hendrik van Bergen, the Bishop of Cambrai. He identified the existence of major abuses at the establishment: the sisters were not fulfilling their vows, they were grossly negligent with regard to their nursing duties and they even wore secular clothing. The result was the imposition of rigorous episcopal supervision and comprehensive reform.

Jacob de Croÿ, van Bergen's successor, issued the order for reform in 1508. Nicolaas Roberti, prior of the canons of St Augustine in Sint-Genesius-Rode, was entrusted with the task of putting the Mechelen hospital back in order. Only a year later, Bishop de Croÿ issued the new statutes for the hospital, based on the rule of St Augustine. Henceforth, it was to be the hospital sisters' duty to tend to the sick themselves. In addition, the convent community was expanded from seven nuns to sixteen.

The Mechelen hospital was known for its particular veneration of Our Lady of Sorrows, so much so that it generated actual pilgrimages. On several occasions, including in 1517, the sisters were even permitted to grant indulgences to pilgrims. Initiatives of this sort provided sufficient funds to renovate the complex of buildings at regular intervals. Around 1570, for example, major renovation work was performed on the chapel and the infirmary. The chapel contained an altar dedicated to St Catherine. Could the triptych placed on that altar be identified with the *Enclosed Garden with Sts Elisabeth, Ursula and Catherine* (G2)? We can only surmise. In fact, of the many documents concerning the former hospital, none contains any explicit reference to the Enclosed Gardens.

Vande vsc dat moos opden kerstmacht



MEANING

‘In their large virginal room, with white walls, behind the stained-glass windows which the sun powdered gold, in an atmosphere impregnated with prayer and peace, the female religious, in those long-lost days where the Middle Age came to an end, was braiding delicious flowers in silk, silver and gold.’

Camille Poupeye, 1912

III. 31

Silk flowers, Agnus Dei, *paperolles*, relics, pilgrim badges and a *cedula* bearing the inscription ‘Vanden ijse dat vroos opden kersnacht’ (Of the ice that froze on Christmas Eve) – Garden with a Calvary

Enclosed Gardens in Primary Sources: Revisiting the Question of Production and Reception

HANNAH ITERBEKE

ILL. 32

The Virgin and Child
with St Anne and
St Elisabeth – Garden
with St Anne

‘In their large virginal room, with white walls, behind the stained-glass windows which the sun powdered gold, in an atmosphere impregnated with prayer and peace, the female religious, in those long-lost days where the Middle Age came to an end, was braiding delicious flowers in silk, silver and gold.’¹

Camille Poupeye

In 1912, a local historian from Mechelen, Camille Poupeye, published the first extensive study on the Enclosed Gardens of the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwgasthuis (Hospital of Our Lady).² Poupeye presented a romantic picture of the production and reception of these artefacts, proposing that they were the result of a collaboration between carpenters and sculptors on the one hand and devout hospital sisters on the other. The latter group was argued to have woven the silk fauna and flora, after which they assembled all the different pieces, including some religious paraphernalia, into heavenly gardens.³ Other than the division of labour, he also ascribed this kind of mixed-media artefact to the city of Mechelen. Poupeye’s findings on the Mechelen pieces developed into the standard way of studying the phenomenon of these garden-like cabinets. As a result, most sixteenth-century Enclosed Gardens – whether in the Low Countries, Germany or Spain – were linked to the city of Mechelen and the pious handiwork of its nuns and beguines. Subsequently, these objects were also considered to be typical artefacts of female devotion.⁴ It was in the wake of gender studies and women’s history that this approach eventually culminated in the innovative and interdisciplinary research of art historians such

as Jeffrey Hamburger and Paul Vandebroek.⁵ As a result, the Gardens were mainly studied as feminine expressions of late medieval devotion.

Although the seven Gardens of the Hospital of Our Lady are the most exuberant and rare examples from the sixteenth century, the phenomenon of Enclosed Gardens must have been considerably wider in its own time. When analysing written sources of the period, such as accounts, testimonies, wills and inventories, these garden-like cabinets are frequently mentioned in contexts quite different from those generally acknowledged today. It should also be noted that these objects did not just occur in the sixteenth century, but were quite common in the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries too. By studying little-explored primary sources and reconsidering previous findings, this essay hopes to enhance our understanding of the varied environments in which these devotional objects were made and viewed. In contrast to what the seven Mechelen Enclosed Gardens have shown, these mixed-media artefacts were found not only in female religious communities, but also in civil households, luxurious church treasuries and even splendid cabinets of curiosity.

Yet, even though there is no exclusive relationship between Enclosed Gardens and female convents, many of them are undeniably linked with the piety of religious women. The image of the biblical enclosed garden is a reflection of the closed lifestyle to which these devout women committed. As Jeffrey Hamburger has convincingly argued, this secluded way of life is mirrored in both the architecture of the convent and the visual culture of the female religious.⁶ The female religious can truly find her bridegroom Christ within the framework



ILL. 33
Bentlage reliquary
garden, 1499



ILL. 34
Bentlage reliquary
garden, 1520



of these lavishly filled cabinets. Looking at the abundance of silk fauna and flora, the reflections of silver and gold and the saintly remnants, the sister's soul is able to sense the heavenly presence of God and his son.⁷

In addition to the Mechelen hospital sisters there were several other female religious communities who obtained similar flowery cabinets. One of the most remarkable sources on this matter is a manuscript of 1537, held in the state archives of Bruges, which was transcribed and published by James Weale.⁸ The manuscript is an inventory of the Cloister of Our Lady in Bruges and mentions ten items that can be classified as Enclosed Gardens. For some of the cabinets, it also documents their provenance and the year in which they entered the convent. Some of these Enclosed Gardens had been given to one of the professed sisters by relatives or acquaintances, while others were commissioned by the convent's superiors.⁹ The inventory, for instance, mentions that the subprioress, Sister Marie Belyns, ordered an Enclosed Garden: 'Item, a case in which stands a wooden cross and also several figures of the Passion of our Lord and other statuettes in the case decorated with silk flowers, which had been ordered by our venerable subprior, Sister Marie Amenate alias Belyns.'¹⁰ The mother superior of the convent also commissioned a similar piece, which is documented as follows: 'Item, a big case with in the middle a golden scene, the Annunciation, and around decorated with large pure bones of the eleven thousand virgins and other saintly relics decorated with silk flowers; our venerable prioress, Sister Lowise van de Velde, has commissioned it.'¹¹

The document fails, however, to tell its readers about the making of these cabinets. Nevertheless, the fact that some pieces were commissioned suggests they were not actually made within the walls of the convent. It is not possible to exclude this entirely, however, since the convent superiors could have asked their fellow nuns to work on such assignments. Numerous female religious communities, in fact, devoted themselves to virtuous handiwork within the walls of their convent, including the needlework associated with the Gardens' silk flowers. This labour, referred to as *nonnenarbeit* or *Klosterarbeit*, could vary from weaving sheets to bobbin lace and printing devotional images to copying or illuminating manuscripts.¹² Could

some of these Enclosed Gardens and their artificial flowers also be considered as the result of this devotional labour, performed by a community that yearned for the long-lost garden of paradise? Unfortunately, there is no definite answer to this question, but there are clear indications that some convents and beguinages did, in fact, produce these silk flowers to adorn their shrines. In Leuven, for instance, Sister Margaret Smulders of the Bethlehem convent states in a visitation-letter of 1628 that, to her great annoyance, her fellow sisters are always engaged in making silk flowers and decorating their shrines.¹³ The passage reads: 'If someone told Mater she was allowing too much time for making all the bouquets and flowerpots, she would answer that she likes to see a well-adorned image of Our Lord. So do I, but on shrines that are so tiny, what a waste of money.'¹⁴ In another letter she says: 'We know from the chaplain that Anna [Anna Vignarola, a fellow sister]¹⁵ has made from the most expensive silk flowers a large life-like arrangement intended as a gift for her Godfather. There are some in-house who knew about it, but not many. [...] God would that no one of us could make silken flowers, it would be to our profit and salvation.'¹⁶

Another example of the involvement of female religious communities with these reliquary gardens dates from the end of the fifteenth century. As recorded in the 1499 chronicles of the Crosiers of Bentlage (Germany), the Cistercian nuns of Bersenbrück were asked to decorate and embellish the Crosiers' relic treasures for their altar.¹⁷ This entry has been connected to the two Bentlage reliquary gardens (Ill. 33 and 34).¹⁸ Even though the Cistercian nuns made these reliquaries, they belonged to a male monastery. This interesting interplay between male and female religious groups has not received enough attention. Previously, these shrines were considered further proof of the connection between female religious communities and the artificial gardens. The 'male' patronage, on the other side, has been overlooked.

An interesting case study regarding male patronage concerns the Enclosed Gardens that were part of the monumental relic collection of Cardinal Albrecht von Brandenburg.¹⁹ These Gardens are documented in the form of drawings in the famous *Hallesches Heiltumsbuch* (Halle Relic Book). This manuscript, held in the Hofbibliothek of Aschaffenburg (Germany) and completed around 1525,



III. 35
*Hallesches
 Heiltumsbuch*, c. 1526

depicts 350 reliquaries of the renowned Halle relic collection. The illuminations of the prestigious *Hallesches Heiltumsbuch* are ascribed to numerous artists including Albrecht Dürer, Peter Flötner, Martin Schongauer, the Cranach School and many others.²⁰ The manuscript served as the cardinal's personal inventory of his extremely large reliquary collection. Each drawing is accompanied by a description of the objects shown on the previous folio. Sometimes these descriptions have been annotated by Cardinal von Brandenburg himself. The *Heiltumsbuch* is divided into nine *gangen*, or chapters, according to the *Heiligtum* (relics) the depicted reliquaries contain. The first chapter, for example, depicts those reliquaries which 'hold the relics of the beloved saints and martyrs whose bones are "mixed" but also Agnus Dei and pieces of the Holy Land'.²¹ It is in this first chapter that we can find several Gardens (Ill. 35). The description of these pieces never refers to the 'Enclosed Garden' nor to the 'paradisiacal' setting, but focuses purely on the relics. In this particular case, the primary function of these mixed-media cabinets was to serve as a container for relics. One could even ask whether these luxuriously filled cabinets were not

just an aesthetically pleasing way for the cardinal to assemble and display various small *devotionalia*. Nevertheless, the presence of these Gardens in the collection of a powerful, high-ranking clergyman further questions the feminine character of Enclosed Gardens.

The same conclusion can be drawn when examining the core group of Mechelen Enclosed Gardens. Even though the connection to the hospital sisters is undeniable, there is also a clear presence of the other sex. For example, when examining the painted wings of these cabinets, we can distinguish several male figures. As Andrea Pearson has demonstrated, the figures portrayed are both religious and lay. The inner and outer left wing of the *Enclosed Garden with a Crucified Christ* (G5), for instance, show the two administrators of the convent after the reformation of the Hospital of Our Lady in 1508.²² The left wing of the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2) (Ill. 36) portrays a layman identified as Jacob Van den Putte, father of one of the hospital sisters, Maria Van den Putte.²³ The presence of both female and male genders, and their varied religious backgrounds, raise the question of whether the Enclosed Gardens were objects solely made by and for a female religious community. As Pearson correctly argues, more attention needs to be paid to the issues of gender in relation to the Enclosed Gardens.²⁴

As already touched upon, Enclosed Gardens were not solely commissioned or used by religious communities. Early modern lay men and women also favoured these artefacts for their private devotion. Looking at early modern wills and inventories, one can see that these gardens also had a place in domestic spaces of civil houses. A fifteenth-century will of a certain Phillip d'Escamaing states: 'Item, I bequeath to damsel d'Escamaing, Robert's wife, a garden adorned with silken flowers, in which is found a representation of Christ.'²⁵ Not only does this will, dated 1455, testify to the fact that the owner of an Enclosed Garden wasn't always female nor religious, this document is also a remarkable early example of these types of gardens. Similarly, the sixteenth-century inventory of a certain Guillem Adams, a sugar salesman in Antwerp, mentions 'a silk garden with our dear lord and Mary Magdalene standing in a wooden case'.²⁶ This entry is followed by two other pieces that one could identify as Enclosed Gardens.²⁷

However, Enclosed Gardens appeared not only in the domestic space of lay men and women, but also in the luxurious cabinets of curiosity of noble residences. In *Leben mit Kunst*, Dagmar Eichberger analysed the way art and ‘non-art’, such as *naturalia*, were arranged within the court at Mechelen of Margaret of Austria, then governess of the Habsburg Netherlands.²⁸ Margaret’s distinguished art collection featured several Enclosed Gardens, which she held in her *cabinet empres le Jardin* (‘the cabinet near the garden’).²⁹ These artefacts are recorded in several documents drawn up in 1516 and 1523.³⁰ The 1523 inventory states: ‘Item, a beautiful garden with several silk flowers, made by needle where there are several figures, trees and other things, in the middle of this garden there is an Enclosed Garden of a green hedge, in which Our Lady is seated, holding her child and St Joseph at the foot of the tree’.³¹ In the earlier document of 1516 it was noted that this garden was a present from the Duchess of Norfolk.³²

The example of Margaret of Austria also provides an excellent lens through which to examine the problem of the production of Enclosed Gardens. Apart from the piece that Margaret had received as a gift, she commissioned these gardens. The January accounts recorded in the *Chambre des Comptes* of 1521 mention the involvement of the well-known Gerard Horenbout, her painter and illuminator living in Ghent, in the making of her ‘*petit Jardin*’.³³ The account states the following on this topic: ‘Item, for the twenty days that he has worked with the nuns of Galilée in Ghent on the small garden made of silk flowers and other small objects. Item, for his work of the two days which it took him to come straight from Ghent to Mechelen to bring the box in which the small garden was held and for the four days after this delivery, to return to Ghent during which he stayed in Mechelen for two days.’³⁴ Considering that Horenbout was actually living in Ghent at the time this Enclosed Garden was commissioned, he might have known the artistic climate of the city quite well. Since the sisters of the Galilée priory were not allowed to leave the convent, Horenbout could have acted as a kind of contractor assembling different *menutez* (precious trinkets) in completion of the garden-like altarpiece. By itself, however, this account does not show the active involvement of the sisters in the making of this Enclosed Garden. However, an



III. 36
Commissioner Jacob
Van den Putte on the
left shutter of the
Garden with St Ursula,
c. 1513-1524

account of 17 January, in this same *Chambre des Comptes* of 1521, records that Margaret of Austria reimbursed Madame Praet, a religious woman of the Galilée priory in Ghent, for the several pieces she made for the embellishment of her little garden of silk and other efforts.³⁵ It thus becomes clear that the sisters of Galilée were also actively concerned with the making of this piece. One month later, on 9 February, Margaret of Austria commanded Jean Marnix, *trésorier et receveur general*, to commission black satin and deliver this to the sisters of Galilée as recompense for the green satin that was left over from the making of several artefacts for the Enclosed Garden. The merchant who delivered the black satin should also retrieve the remaining green satin and bring it to her court in Mechelen.³⁶

It is unclear whether this Garden was still in Margaret's possession at the time the inventory of 1523 was drawn up. There are several objects that could be identified as the *petit jardinet* of Ghent, although it is also possible that she had given the piece away by that time. In any case, it seems Margaret was pleased with the efforts of the sisters of Galilée because, in 1524, she requested their craftsmanship again. In a letter dated 27 November 1524, she asked Madame Praet once more to make 'the most exquisite pieces', since she intended to give them to their sainted father, the pope.³⁷ The same Sister Praet is addressed in the matter of an *ouvrage* (work). Although the *ouvrage* is not specified, it might be possible that Sister Praet was working on yet another Enclosed Garden that would be given to Pope Clement VII – although further research is needed to support this thesis.³⁸

The case of the governess's *petit jardinet* not only provides a glimpse into the making of these kinds of objects, it also begs the question of whether Mechelen was the dominant production centre. Even though Margaret of Austria's court was in Mechelen, the governess commissioned her Enclosed Garden in Ghent. A closer examination of the interaction between the sisters of the Galilée priory and the governess suggest that she was a patron of the convent.

The aforementioned January account of Gerard Horenbout also mentions designs for a stained-glass window for the church of the Galilée convent.³⁹ Even though most of the Galilée sisters were of noble birth, the reconstruction of their convent after a fire in 1515 created financial difficulty.⁴⁰ It was in this context that Margaret of Austria offered financial support for the decoration of the convent's church. The *Chambre des Comptes* of 1521 records a reimbursement to the Galilée sisters for the stained glass made according to Horenbout's designs, depicting 'the Seven Joys of the Blessed Virgin Mary accompanied by the patron saint resembling Margaret of Austria armed with her coat of arms'.⁴¹

In addition to this stained-glass window, Margaret also gave the convent a painting by Bernard van Orley, which is documented to have entered the convent in 1527. This painting can, in all probability, be identified with a portrait of Margaret which she gave to Madame Praet.⁴² A possible explanation for the commission of her *petit jardinet* at the convent in Ghent could therefore be her relationship to the convent as patron, protector and friend of the nuns.

In conclusion, by analysing these primary sources it becomes clear that the profile of the users or collectors of these kind of garden-like altarpieces is less gendered than we have concluded so far. Although the connection between female religious communities and Enclosed Gardens is irrefutable, it seems that both religious and lay, noble and civil, female and male people were the viewers of these artefacts. Likewise, their production process seems to have involved both male craftsman and religious women. Enclosed Gardens should therefore no longer be considered exclusively female.

1 Camille Poupeye, 'Les jardins clos et leurs rapports avec la sculpture malinoise,' *Bulletin du Cercle archéologique, littéraire et artistique de Malines* 22 (1912): 51-114, op. cit. 89.

2 Poupeye, 'Les jardins clos': 51-114. For an even earlier account, see: W.H. James Weale, *Catalogue des objets d'art religieux du Moyen Age, de la Renaissance et des temps modernes, exposés à l'Hôtel Liedekerke à Malines* (Brussels: C. Lelong, 1864), 38-41 (cat. 213-219).

3 Poupeye, 'Les jardins clos': 89.

4 Horst Apphun, 'Die Paradiesgärtlein des Klosters Ebstorf: Der hochwürdigen Frau Äbtissin Edelgard von Arnswaldt Gewidmet,' *Lüneburger Blätter* 19/20 (1968/1969): 27-36; Erik Vandamme, 'Het "besloten hofje" in het Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten te Antwerpen. Bijdrage tot de studie van de kunstnijverheid in de provinciale Zuidnederlandse centra omstreeks 1500,' *Archivum Artis Lovaniense. Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis van de kunst der Nederlanden, opgedragen aan Prof. Em. Dr. J.K. Steppe*, ed. Maurits Smeyers (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1981), 143-149; ed. Christine Schedensack, *Westfalen: Hefte für Geschichte, Kunst und Volkskunde* 77, 1 (1999): 2-174; Reinhard Karrenbrock and Marc Peez, 'Die "besloten hofjes" in St Nicolai in Kalkar,' *Jahrbuch der rheinischen Denkmalpflege* 44 (2014): 118-146; Martin Hammer and Gisela Hauck, 'Ein "besloten hofje" aus dem Johannesaltar in St Nicolai in Kalkar,' *Jahrbuch der rheinischen Denkmalpflege* 44 (2014): 147-164.

5 Paul Vandenbroeck, *Hooglied. De beeldwereld van religieuze vrouwen in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden vanaf de 13e eeuw* (Brussels-Ghent: Paleis voor Schone Kunsten/Snoeck-Ducaju, 1994); Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Rothschild Canticles: Art and Mysticism in Flanders and the Rhineland circa 1300* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998); eds. Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Susan Marti, *Crown & Veil: Female Monasticism from the Fifth to the Fifteenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

6 Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary*, 35-110; Hamburger, Marx and

Marti, 'The Time of the Orders, 1200-1500,' 59-61. See also: Carolyn Diskant Muir, *Saintly Brides and Bridegrooms: The Mystic Marriage in Northern Renaissance Art* (London: Harvey Miller, 2012); Janice M. Pinder, 'The Cloister and the Garden: Gendered Images of Religious Life from the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries,' *Listen, Daughter: The Speculum Virginum and the Formation of Religious Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Constant J. Mews (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 159-179.

7 On the sensorial experience of Enclosed Gardens, see: Barbara Baert, *Late Medieval Enclosed Gardens of the Low Countries: Contributions to Gender and Artistic Expression*, Studies in Iconology 2 (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2016).

8 James Weale, 'Le couvent des soeurs de Notre Dame dit de Sion, à Bruges,' *Le Beffroi. Arts, héraldique, archéologie*, vol. 3 (1867): 46-53, 76-92, 213-230, 301-328.

9 'Item een cleen proper tafelkin, sluitende met twee duerkins, binnen ghewrocht borduerwerc met glas daer vooren, Sinte Michiel in de middel, Maria met haer Kindekin an de een zyde, ende Sinte Paula an d'ander zyde, ende buuten olyvarwe Sinte Katheline ende Sinte Barbele: 't welcke quamvan heer Michiel var Houve, prochipape van Sinte Wouburghe, die dat ghaf voortyts zynde zyn biecht dochter onse eerweerdeghe mater prioresse, suster Lisbette van der Ranneelle, die dat jonstelic der kercken ghegheven heeft, anno xvevij.' ('Item a small neat tableau, closing with two wings, inside there is woven embroidery with glass in front, St Michael in the middle, Mary with her Child on one side, and St Paula on the other side, and outside, in oil, St Catherine and St Barbara: which came from lord Michiel van Houve, parish priest of St Walburga, who previously gave it to his confessant, our venerable mater prioress, Sister Lisbette van der Ranneelle, who recently gave it to the church, in the year 1507.') See: Weale, 'Le couvent des soeurs de Notre Dame,' 79.

10 'Item een casse daer een houte cruce in staet ende ooc diversche figuren van de Passie ons Heeren ende andere beeldekins in kaskens verschiert met zyde blommekins, dat welcke dede maecken onse eerweerdeghe supprioresse, suster Marie Amenate alias Belyns. Vacat.' See: Weale, 'Le couvent des soeurs de Notre Dame,' 88-89.

11 'Item een groote kasse daer in't middel

staet een ghoude taffereelke, de Botschap van Maria, ende roontomme verschiert met groote schoone ghebeenten van xj^m Maechden ende andere heleghe reliquien verschiert met zyde blommen; onse eerweerdeghe mater prioresse, suster Lowise van de Velde, heeft se doen maecken.' See: Weale, 'Le couvent des soeurs de Notre Dame,' 88.

12 Jan Gerchow, Susan Marti, "Nuns' Work" "Caretaker Institutions," and "Women's Movement": Some Thoughts About a Modern Historiography of Medieval Monasticism,' eds. Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Susan Marti, *Crown and Veil*, 132-150.

13 I would like to thank Eelco Nagelsmit for introducing me to the work of Professor Craig Harline, and Professor Harline himself for providing me with the English translation of these documents.

14 'Datter imant aen mater sijde datmen te veel tijt hanckt aen alle dee meijkens ende bloompot te maecken sij soude(n) andtwoorde, datse geerna diet dat onsen lieve heere verchiert is, Ich ooch maer kaskens die soo cleen sijn dat is alle verlore cost.' See: *Visitation-letters of June 19-20*, fol. 14, 1628. Archive of the Archdiocese of Mechelen-Brussels (Belgium), Fonds Kloosters, Grauwzusters Leuven. Translation into English by Craig Harline.

15 Anna Vignarola is mentioned in the visitation-letters of several sisters, all complaining about her making those silk flowers.

16 'desen capelaen weeten wy als dat vinnarola een 'prieelken (?)' onderhanden heeft vandie alder costelichster / bloomen die naer het leve(n) gemaect werden om haeren peter schincken daer sijnder sie huys diet geweets hebben / maer niet veel [...] godt ga(r)ne datter niemant hier huys wisten sijde bloome en costen / maecken het soude(n) ons profytelyck en(de) oock salligher syn.' See: *Visitation-letters of June 19-20*, fol. 18, 1628. Archive of the Archdiocese of Mechelen-Brussels (Belgium), Fonds Kloosters, Grauwzusters Leuven. Translation into English by Craig Harline. For more information on the case of the Bethlehem convent of Leuven see: Hannah Iterbeke, 'Cultivating Devotion: The Sixteenth-Century Enclosed Gardens of the Low Countries,' *IKON: Journal of Iconographic Studies* 10 (2017): 237-250.

17 'Sanctimoniales in Bertzebrugge ex devota caritate ornaverunt reliquias pro

summo altari.' See: Hartmut Krohm, 'Reliquienpräsentation und Blumengärten – Kunstgeschichtliche Bemerkungen zu den Schreinen in Kloster Bentlage,' *Westfalen: Hefte für Geschichte, Kunst und Volkskunde* 77, 1 (1999): 23; Reinhard Karrenbrock, 'Die Bildwerke der Bentlager Reliquienschreine und ihre stilkritische Einordnung,' *Westfalen: Hefte für Geschichte, Kunst und Volkskunde* 77, 1 (1999): 53.

18 Although this entry in the Bentlage Chronicle (*Chronicon Bentlacense*) is rather generic, the two reliquary gardens were reported on the altar of the monastery's church in the beginning of the 19th century. See: Krohm, 'Reliquienpräsentation und Blumengärten,' 24.

19 Dagmar Eichberger, *Leben mit Kunst, Wirken durch Kunst: Sammelwesen und Hofkunst unter Margarete von Österreich, Regentin der Niederlande* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 398; Dagmar Eichberger, 'A Renaissance Reliquary Collection in Halle, and its Illustrated Inventories,' *Art Bulletin of Victoria*, 37 (1996): 19-36.

20 Philipp Maria Halm and Rudolf Berliner, *Das Hallesche Heiltum: Man. Aschaffenb. 14* (Berlin: Deutscher Verein für Kunstwissenschaft, 1931); Ursula Timann, 'Bemerkungen zum Halleschen Heiltum,' in *Der Kardinal Albrecht von Brandenburg, Renaissancefürst und Mäzen* (Halle: Moritzburg, 2006), 255-283.

21 'Im Ersten Gange wirdt Ewer liebe vnnd andacht gezeigt werdenn Heylighthumb der liebenn heyligen, welcher gebeyne durcheynander gemischt liegenn Als meterern Zcwofffbothenn vnnd andere liebenn heyligenn. Deßgleichenn Heylighthumb welcher schrifft und ezedeln vorblichenn vnd von alter gancz vnleszlich wordenn seyndt. Auch Agnus Dej Vnd heylighthumb vom heyligenn lande Vnnd was Bebstliche heylichkeit Iherlich benedicirt Vnd konige vnnd fursten domitt verehret.' See: Philipp Halm and Berliner, *Das Hallesche Heiltum*, 21.

22 See catalogue, pp. 30-31.

23 Andrea Pearson, 'Sensory Piety as Social Intervention in a Mechelen Besloten Hofje,' *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 9 (2) (Summer 2017).

24 Pearson, 'Sensory Piety as Social Intervention in a Mechelen Besloten Hofje'.

25 'Item, je donne à demiselte d'esca-maing, femme à Robert, ung gardinet

ordonne de fleurs de soye, auquel est la pourtraiture de Nostre Seigneur'. This entry has been interpreted as a tapestry although it seems more likely to be what we would call an Enclosed Garden. See: Eugène Soil, *Les tapisseries de Tournai : les tapissiers et les hautelisseurs de cette ville. Recherches et documents sur l'histoire, la fabrication et les produits des ateliers de Tournai* (Tournai: Vas-seur-Delmée, 1892): 27, 234.

26 'eenen syden hoff met ons lieve heer ende Maria Magdalena staende in een weecke schuyfflaye'. First published in Carolien De Staelen, 'Spulletjes en hun betekenis in een commerciële metropool,' unpublished PhD, Antwerp, University of Antwerp, 2006-2007, 194. For the original document see: Felixarchief Antwerpen (SAA), N, 1175, nr. 115, Guillem Adams (1591), VI.

27 'noch twee syde hoffkens wesende deen de bootschap ende dander ons lieff heer int hoffken staende elck in een weecke schuyfflaye' ('two more silken gardens one with the annunciation and the other with our dear lord in the garden standing each in a soft case'). See: De Staelen, 'Spulletjes en hun betekenis in een commerciële metropool,' 194. For the original document see: SAA, N, 1175, nr. 115, Guillem Adams (1591), VI.

28 Eichberger, *Leben mit Kunst*.

29 The 1523 inventory mentions the following: 'Aultres menutez, estans au petit cabinet, ou sont les coraux et jardin de fleurs de soie, fil d'or et aultres choses fait a l'esgulle, dont s'ensuyt les pièces est ans d'argent.' ('Other small things, which are held [in] the small cabinet, where the corals and gardens of flowers made of silk, gold thread and other embroideries [are kept], followed by those pieces made in silver.') See: ed. Fernando Checa Cremades, *The Inventories of Charles V and the Imperial Family*, vol. III (Madrid: Fernando villaverde ediciones, 2010), 2460.

30 Dagmar Eichberger, 'Margaret of Austria and the documentation of her collection in Mechelen,' in *The Inventories of Charles V and the Imperial Family*, vol. III, 2351-2363.

31 'Item vng beau jardin de plusieurs fleurs, fait a l'esguille ou jl y a plusieurs personaiges, habres et autres choses, au milieu duquel jardin jl y vng preau clot d'une haye verde, dedans lequel est Nostre Dame

tenant son enfant et saint Jhosept au pied d'ung habre.' See: Checa Cremades, *The Inventories of Charles V and the Imperial Family*, vol. III, 2461.

32 'Vng petit preaux, dedanz lequel a vngne nostre dame et vng saint Josief. Vng arbre au mylieu du dit preaux a vng aubepin flory, et madame la duchesse de Nerefolk l'a donne a madame.' See: *The Inventories of Charles V and the Imperial Family*, vol. III, 2417; Eichberger, *Leben mit Kunst*, 398.

33 Algemeen Rijksarchief (A.R.), *Chambre des Comptes*, 1797, fol. 155r.-157r. See also: Eichberger, *Leben mit Kunst*, 398.

34 '[...] Item, pour vingt jours entiers quil a vacque avec les religieuses de galilea audit gand a recoustjerer le petit Jardin de mad(ict)e dame de fleurs de soye et autres menutez qui au pris de viij ung chacun jour a luy ordonnez par madicte Dame viij £ / Item pour ses vacacions de deux jours entiers quil a vacque a venir drois led(ict) gand a malines et a appourter le coffret on esfort led(ict) Jardin y compris son charriage et despence de bouche par luy fait xlii s et pour quatre jour entiers quil a vacque au(dict) Malines compris aussi deux journées pour son retour audict gand et charriage de sa some lxxviij s [...]'. A.R., *Chambre des Comptes*, 1797, fol. 156v. First published in Alexandre Pinchart, *Archives des arts, sciences et lettres. Documents inédits publiés et annotés par Alexandre Pinchart*, Première série (Ghent: Hebbelynck, 1860-1881), 17. See also: Eichberger, *Leben mit Kunst*, 398.

35 '[...] A la dame de Prat, religieuse en Gallilée à Gand tant, pour son ramboursement de plusieurs parties, par elle fraiées, pour l'accoustrement de son petit jardin de soye, que d'aultres ses ouvrage [...]'. See: Josef Duverger, 'Gerard Horenbault (1465?-1540): Hofschilder van Margareta van Oostenrijk,' *De Kunst: Maandblad voor Oude en Jonge Kunst*, 1 (1930), 90.

36 A.R., *Acquits de Lille*, 524, II, fol. 71r. The merchant who executed this command was Thomas Bombelli. See: A.R., *Chambre des Comptes*, 1797, fol. 154v. For more information on Thomas Bombelli, see: Federica Veratelli, *À la mode italienne. Commerce du luxe et diplomatie dans les Pays-Bas méridionaux (1477-1530). Édition critique de documents de la Chambre des comptes de Lille* (Lille: Presses universitaires du Septentrion

& Archives départementales du Nord, 2013), 26, 66-70, 72, 108, 111-117, 287, 291, 325, 328, 331, 332, 337, 341, 342, 357, 359, 360-362. See also: R.D.A. Van Elslande and A.M.J. De Kraker, 'De familie Horenbault: renaissancekunstenars en cartografen te Gent en daarbuiten (c. 1460 tot c. 1630),' *Jaarboek 2004-2006 Oudheidkundige Kring "De Vier Ambachten"* Hulst (Terneuzen: Drukkerij Bareman, 2007), 32.

37 'Madame de Praet, nous vous renvoyons par Estienne, nostre varlet de chambre, l'ouvrage que nous avez envoyé monstrier et trouvons bien fait et duysant a l'affaire ce que y avez adjousté, vous priant affectueusement vouloir faire les pyeces les plus exquisement que vous pourrez car c'est pur Nostre Saint pere le pape et diserons fort que le present soit tel que ayons honneur a l'envoyer comme ce dit pourteur vous dira et vous nous serez singulier plaisir que recongnoistrons, vous priant pour la fin de nostre lettre faire nos salutacions a vostre mater et a seur de Falais, en vous disant adieu. A Madame de Praet. A la mere ancelle de nostre couvent de l'anunciante les Bruges.' Archives départementales du Nord (A.D.N.), *Répertoire numérique. Série B: Chambre des Comptes de Lille*, 18901, 34509.

38 As several letters testify, it seems Madame Praet and Margaret of Austria had a kind of friendship. See: A.D.N., *Répertoire numérique. Série B: Chambre des Comptes de Lille*, 18901, 34512, 18906, 34879, 19000, 38837-38838. See also: E. van Mingroot, 'Prieuré de Galilée à Gand,' in *Monasticon belge*, vol. VII: Province de Flandre orientale (Liège: Centre national de recherches d'histoire religieuse, 1977), 775.

39 'Item pour par ordonnance de maddame avoir fait vng patron De verriere en leglise de galilee a gand xls.' ('Item for the order of madame of having made a stained-glass pattern in the church of Galilée in Ghent'). A.R., *Chambre des Comptes*, 1797, fol. 156r.

40 Van Mingroot, 'Prieuré de Galilée à Gand,' 761-794; Wilhelm Kohl, *Monasticon Windeshemense*, vol. 1: *Belgien* (Brussels: Archief- en bibliotheekwezen in België, 1976), 239-267.

41 'Aux abesse et seurs de Galilee de gand la somme de soixante dixuyt du prix de quarante gros monnoie de flandr et la livre.

*De laquelle somme madame par set l(etr)es patentes en Date du xviii jour darvril xv^exxi leur a fait don de grace especial pour ve fois pour dieu et en aulmosu Et aussi en faveur dune belle verriere mise et assise au cueur De leglise dudit cloistre de gallilee ou est historie le sept joyees de no(tr)e Dame avec la protecture de la semblame dicelle dame armoye de ses armes. Pour ce par quictan avec les l(ett)res patentes veriffiee par les chef des finan(ces) de madame cy Rendues lad(ite) somme de lxxviii L.' A.R., *Chambre des Comptes*, 1797, fol. 124v.-125r.*

42 'A maistre Bernard Dorlet, painctre de feu madame, la somme de quatre-vingt-deux livres dudit prix, pour son paiement des parties douvraiges de son mestier cy apres declarees, [...] sept tableaux de la pourtraicture dicelle feu dame, donnez, par son ordonnance, assavoir au prieur de Pouligny ung, a feu madame de Hornes ung, a mademoiselle de Thoulouze ung, a madame de Praet en Galilee à Gand ung, au bailly de Terremonde ung, a ung gentilhomme de Lorraine ung, a mons le tresourier Ruffault ung.' See: Alexandre Henne, *Histoire du règne de Charles-Quint en Belgique*, vol. V (Brussels: Flatau, 1859), 82; Kohl, *Monasticon Windeshemense*, 252-253.



The New Garden of Paradise and the Unicorn

ROB FAESEN

ILL. 37

Virgin with the unicorn – Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn

The *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) has the following Gothic lettering inscribed on its fence: *Reynosceron forti imperio egressus de celi palatio / virginis mansuescit in germio nos veneni purgans a vicio* ('The unicorn, who quit the heavenly palace for a mighty dominion, became tame in the lap of a virgin, thus purging from us the venom of sin'). The entrance gate bears the text: *Tu es hortus cunctis deliciis affluens multisque divitiis, nullis umquam tactus spurcitiis gignens florem refectum gratiis* ('You are a garden that overflows with every delight and with many treasures, never besmirched with any spot, and that brings forth the restored flower of grace'). The text on the gate could refer in the first instance to the human soul. After all, *deliciis affluens* is an allusion to the Song of Songs (8:5), where the bridegroom – often interpreted allegorically as Christ – says admiringly and lovingly of his bride – often interpreted as the human soul: 'Who is this that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights?' (*Quae est ista, quae ascendit de deserto, deliciis affluens* ...). However, the continuation ('never besmirched with any spot') relates specifically to the Virgin Mary. Mary is the only human being to have been conceived and to have entered the world without the 'spot' of original sin (*macula non est in te* – Song of Songs 4:7). She brought forth Christ, who is named in the Garden's inscription as 'the flower of grace'. We see a depiction of that 'flower': the crucified Christ whose restoration (*refectum*) unfolds on the cross. Given that all this relates to a garden (*tu es hortus*), we are reminded immediately of the paradise embodied in the Garden of Eden, often referred to as the *hortus deliciarum*. Song of Songs (4:12) speaks of the bride as a *hortus conclusus*: a locked or enclosed garden. Therefore, the text on the entrance gate suggests that in this case we are seeing the new paradise, filled with flowers and with the tree of life – namely the Tree of the Cross – and the loveliest flower at its centre. This is an allusion to the famous sixth-century Latin hymn to the Cross (*inter omnes arbor una nobilis, nulla talem silva profert flore, fronde, germine* ...). In other words, through the medium of the Virgin Mary, who is the entrance gate, we are looking at the new paradise: no longer the first paradise where the Fall of Man occurred, but rather the new, universal paradise, where the definitive restoration will be fulfilled.

The text on the fence confirms this. Pliny the Elder (AD c. 23-79) wrote that the unicorn, which was said to live in India, was the most utterly wild of animals and was almost impossible to capture.¹ This theme was elaborated upon by Isidore of Seville (560-636). He said that, according to other sources, the only way to capture the animal was to have a virgin offer her lap to the beast, whereupon it would lay its head to rest on her lap and fall asleep.² This was sometimes seen as a metaphor for the Virgin Mary, who was capable of 'capturing' God. This – at first sight, rather strange – notion is encountered in the writings of the thirteenth-century female mystic Hadewijch of Brabant.³ According to her, no person had ever known God's absolute and complete love before the Virgin Mary had consented to God in all humility. The anthropogenesis of God began at that instant, and thus the revelation of that absolute, divine love.

¹ Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, trans. Harris Rackham, vol. III, 8, 76 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library 353, 1967), 56-57.

² Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum sive Originum libri XX* (CPL 1186) lib. 12, cap. 2, par. 12-13.

³ Hadewijch, *Mengeldichten*, ed. J. Van Mierlo (Antwerp: Standaard-Boekhandel, 1952), poem 14, lines 41-46; Hadewijch, *Brieven*, ed. J. Van Mierlo (Antwerp: Standaard-Boekhandel, 1947), letter 12, lines 3-5.

Growing, Making, Meaning, with Special Attention to the Paperrolles

BARBARA BAERT

ILL. 38
Detail of the
paperrolles – Garden
with the Hunt of
the Unicorn

'Yes, everything becomes attenuated, but it's also true to say that nothing entirely disappears, there remain faint echoes and elusive memories that can surface at any moment like the fragments of gravestones in the room in a museum that no one visits [...]. We never eliminate all vestiges, though, we never manage, truly, once and for all, to silence that past matter, and sometimes we hear an almost imperceptible breathing.'

Javier Marías, *The Infatuations*, translated
by Margaret Jull Costa (2014), 310-311

The early sixteenth-century Enclosed Gardens (or *horti conclusi*) of the Low Countries form an exceptional world heritage collection from the late medieval period.¹ Most Enclosed Gardens have been lost to the ravages of time, with this loss exacerbated by lack of both understanding and interest. Just how many Enclosed Gardens were created in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries are unknown, as most were destroyed as the result of numerous religious and political conflicts from the sixteenth to the late eighteenth century.

However, the seven surviving *horti conclusi* of the Mechelen *gasthuiszusters* (Augustinian hospital sisters), which escaped destruction thanks to the community's close involvement and protection, and which are now in the Museum Hof van Busleyden, testify to the spiritual and material testimonies of a living tradition of the sisters from the Hospital of our Lady (Onze-Lieve-Vrouwegasthuis). Until the late twentieth century, they were kept in the living space of these sisters as facets of their spiritual life. For nuns, the daily care for the 'artificial gardens' was a religious labour and responsibility in spiritual horticulture. One garden is documented as once belonging to the spindle room of nuns.²

The flowers and embroidered wrappings for objects such as stones, medallions and relics in the Enclosed Gardens were created by the religious women with subtle refinement and an astonishing range of effects. With silk and precious silver threads, nuns twisted knots and patterns over armatures of fine parchment, incorporating glass pearls, semi-precious stones and sequins. Artificial flowers and fruit, especially branches of wild roses, white lilies and pink grapes, surround the wooden



statuettes known as *poupées de Malines* ('dolls of Mechelen'), relics and small pipe-clay figures. At the back of the wooden box containing each Garden, dense lozenge patterns are created by webbed threads stitched over the rolls of silk damask that cover relics and parchment and are known as *paperolles* (French) or *paperollen* (Dutch) (Ill. 38).

So far, the term *paperolles* has been used to indicate these textile-enveloped paper rolls. However, this term is more commonly employed in the context of paper quilling, an art technique that concerns small pieces of paper rolled and modelled in different shapes and subsequently attached to a back support.³ In contrast to the *paperolles* used for quilling, the textile-enveloped rolls in the Enclosed Gardens are not shaped into specific decorative shapes. Nevertheless, given that these cylinders are, in fact, rolls of paper and parchment, the term *paperolles* remains the most accurate terminology when addressing these items.

Only recently have Enclosed Gardens, as a genre and a medium, come to be acknowledged and recognised as a worthwhile field of study. As they are such typically hybrid objects, they long seemed to defy the accepted terminology and conventions in research into medieval material devotional culture.⁴ Then, in the 1990s, drawing from gender studies and the 'anthropological turn', Jeffrey Hamburger and Paul Vandebroek pioneered the re-contextualisation of the genre.⁵ Today, Enclosed Gardens are approached as ambivalent artefacts whose purpose lies somewhere in between retable and domestic furniture.⁶ Moreover, as they contain relics and a variety of 'lesser' remnants, such as stones, bones and bags of sand, they may also be seen as shrines. Perhaps Enclosed Gardens are best conceptualised as cabinets of curiosities, whose content conveys the character and spirituality of the religious women who assembled them.

In sum, late medieval convents in the Low Countries saw the emergence of a unique form of mixed-media art, involving recycled and ready-made items that, in a very specific way, articulated the feminine devotional identity and maintained a layered relationship with sacral topography. By wrapping the stone and bone fragments in fine textiles, they were lifted out of their inert material mundanity and came to represent their very opposite, namely vigorous life itself.

My aim in this essay is to contribute towards the tectonic significance of the gardens and, in particular, the role of structures and creative processes in them. In recent years, new paradigms have been formulated to help us to understand Enclosed Gardens, with the dynamic of the creative process being the signifier. I shall be defending the position that the traditional division between form and substance, between artefact and nature, and thus also between making and growing, is of lesser relevance in this case. By extension, this approach opens up new perspectives on the status of the Enclosed Gardens as artefacts during the period at the boundary between the Middle Ages and modernity.

By way of a case study, I shall be focusing on what we term *paperolles* in the Enclosed Gardens of Mechelen. The three-dimensional trellis attached to the rear wall of the retables acts as a supporting growth window for the Enclosed Garden's flowers and vines. The trellis consolidates a perspective on the artefact as an organism. Moreover, the *paperolles* with their lozenge-shaped ensemble form part of the *longue durée* of the lattice motif, which draws its symbolic energy from the fabric paradigm.

TOWARDS NEW HERMENEUTICS

As shall become apparent in this essay, Enclosed Gardens are highly complex artefacts and, in fact, prove to be a never-ending source of fresh information. Research is forever providing new insights; new items are continually being found for the archives, and at present it is one of the most compelling interdisciplinary projects within the arts, given the interest that Enclosed Gardens generate among curators, art historians, historians, anthropologists and theologians. With this exceptional dynamic in mind, I shall be selecting three approaches that I consider to be important.

Let us begin with the question of how we should define the Enclosed Gardens. Answering this question is complicated. Enclosed Gardens evade the existing frameworks and typologies that we usually employ in connection with late medieval devotional objects. This is unsurprising with regard to such utterly hybrid objects. Enclosed Gardens are three-dimensional 'boxes', *Kunstkammern*, *cabinets de curiosités*.⁷ And being more diorama

than image – namely a three-dimensional miniature or life-size scene in which figures or other objects are arranged in a naturalistic setting against a background – the gardens demand a more brutal, ‘direct’ stepping into the ‘de facto’ space. Where the Gardens may lack the complexity of rooms into rooms, and hence the highly layered subtlety of medium-spatiality and meta-*Bildraum*, there the Garden articulates instead a more explicit *Bildakt* of bodily performance. This bodily performance is twofold from the point of view of the maker as of the viewer, who is (actually) often also the maker. The making process is intrinsic to the meaning of horticulture. The garden lives and grows due to the continuous action of collecting, hiding and treasuring. It refers to the pure joy of making with hands: this unique immersion in the self, the happiness in the inner room that makes the maker reach mental and emotional transcendence. Maker and viewer are partners in a haptic, sensuous world. The Enclosed Garden is a memory box of generations of religious women. The Enclosed Garden is a *pars pro toto* for the community’s spirituality, collective history and *prospectus*.

Secondly, the objects in the garden refer to the lower material culture of personal devotional items and spiritual souvenirs. Indeed, both the idea of collecting, on the one hand, and the characteristic objects that function as an uploaded *pars pro toto* for holy places such as Jerusalem and Rome, but also small rural Flemish places of pilgrimage, have been the reasons why the Enclosed Gardens are treated with the hermeneutics of mental travelling. According to Kathryn M. Rudy, Enclosed Gardens actually constitute a vehicle for undertaking a mental journey without physically travelling.⁸ Examples of such ‘virtual pilgrimages’ are found in a genre of manuscript in which holy places are visualised and described so that they could be ‘visited’ mentally. Enclosed Gardens can similarly mediate in a spiritual journey to a physically unreachable destination, as one strolls through the garden and playfully searches for the natural objects hidden in the shrubs, and experiences delight at whatever treasure one finds (a relic, a souvenir). Rudy writes: ‘Entering the box, the viewer enters the Holy Land on the scale of a dollhouse, an idealized microcosm of female enclosure.’⁹ The author substantiates her hypothesis by arguing that Enclosed Gardens share two essential characteristics with other forms

of virtual pilgrimage: ‘replacement’ storage by objects, relics and so forth, and visual repetition or ‘accumulation’. These accumulations and replacements continue to this day and will do so into the future for as long as the Enclosed Gardens are still used and studied.

Thirdly and finally, as a box for memories and storage that spans several convent generations, the Enclosed Garden has literally overgrown traditional boundaries and has opened up a research framework that places the creative process at the heart of the matter. The Scottish anthropologist Tim Ingold has pioneered this approach. He refers to the timeworn binary models of classical antiquity, on which we continue to be too reliant when looking at art or, to put it more precisely, at ‘things that are made’.

‘To create anything, Aristotle (384-322 BC) reasoned, you have to bring together form (*morphe*) and matter (*hyle*). In the subsequent history of Western thought, this hylomorphic model of creation became ever more deeply embedded. But it also became increasingly unbalanced. Form came to be seen as imposed by an agent with a particular design in mind, while matter, thus rendered passive and inert, became that which was imposed upon.’¹⁰ ‘In a precise reversal of the conventional subject-object relations of hylomorphism, it is not the mind that imposes its forms on material objects, but rather the latter that give shape to the forms of thought.’¹¹

The hybridity of the Gardens, as well as their accumulation of energy, urge us to ‘overthrow the hylomorphic model itself and to replace it with an ontology that assigns primacy to the processes of formation as against their final products, and to the flows and transformations of materials as against states of matter. What we could call the textility of making.’¹² By ‘textility’ the author means:

‘*Der Fähigkeit, Knoten so formen in Verbindung zu bringen und andererseits mit derjenigen, durch sie hindurchzuschneiden – das heißt, in der Komplementarität von Weben und Zimmerhandwerk, Textilien und Holzwerk – und etymologische Unterstützung für seine Überzeugung in dem vom Griechischen Tekton abstammenden Wortcluster zu suchen.*’¹³

In his volume *Making and Growing*, Tim Ingold connects two activities that result in either the making of the artefact or in the made artefact itself: *The action of Make* (production, creation,

construction, preparation; conversion into or causing to become something), versus *The action of Grow* (to arise or come into existence, to manifest vigorous life, to flourish, to increase gradually in size by natural development, to increase in quantity or degree, to advance towards maturity).¹⁴ He continues:

‘Makers know better, however. They know that the simple answer, designed perhaps to fend off your unwanted attentions as a meddling onlooker, leaves almost everything about their craft unsaid, and implies a certainty about ends and means that, in practice, is largely an illusion. Making things, for them, often feels like telling stories, and as with all stories, though you may pick up the thread and eventually cast it off, the thread itself has no discernible beginning or end.’¹⁵

Enclosed Gardens also pertinently connect the activity of making with the activity of growth processes. The nuns¹⁶ who composed these Enclosed Gardens had an innate sense of how to use silk thread to create the flowers and plants. As Ingold puts it so well, it was through this medium that they were able to tell a ‘plastic story’. The garden has been crafted on the basis of memories, pilgrimages, discourse and song. The fusion of these sophisticated minor works to create a single flourishing work of horticulture that has vitality, that moves with the faintest breeze or sigh, and that time and again can be enriched with relics, miniature sculptures, wax seals and all manner of insignia, connects the creative process itself to its primary source: the garden of courtly love of the Song of Songs. For that reason, the Enclosed Garden is the place where ‘making’ and ‘fertility’ coalesce at a technical, metaphorical, devotional and spiritual level. This intimate fusion compels us to distance ourselves from the polarisation between higher art (usually men) and domestic crafts (usually women).¹⁷ The facts are that the Enclosed Garden fits within neither of these classifications and feeds upon the marvellous interspace between culture and nature, where ‘making’ is an organic process of exclusive and spiritual refinement that generates meaning.

Seen from that perspective, the Enclosed Gardens are surprisingly contemporary and not at all reactionary. After all, it was precisely this growing together of organism and artefact that was taking place in the sixteenth-century *Wunderkammern*, or

cabinets of curiosities, the characteristics of which can also be identified in Enclosed Gardens.¹⁸

My focus is now directed to the particular phenomenon of the *paperolles*: the latticework rear wall in the Mechelen Enclosed Gardens.

PAPEROLLES

Paperolles are covered rolls of paper inserted in lozenge patterns. There are two kinds of roll; although both look exactly the same, some might have functioned as relic holders, as indicated in several cases by the accompanying *cedulae*. The second kind holds nothing but tightly rolled-up, blank sheets of paper, which have been subsequently covered in expensive textiles and decorated with silver thread, pearls and sequins.¹⁹

As a single element, the *paperolles* form a mysterious, enveloping shell: the wrapping up of *something* that is at once *nothing*. It is the *pars pro toto* of the relationship between the emptiness on the one hand and the haptic-exuberant textile arts on the other hand. *Paperolles* exist in their emptiness; they exist in their pure phenomenology of being wrapping and only wrapping (even if the wrapped form as such resonates the presence of a relic as they were often likewise ‘enwrapped’ in relic cabinets). *Paperolles* articulate the very hermeneutical balance between technicity and decoration.

The *paperolles* are made from recycled materials. Although there was an economic reason for this repurposing, there were psychological and spiritual reasons as well. The *paperolles* are imbued with memory, and their life story was ‘written’ by the fingers that rolled them, packaged them and bound them together. Moreover, the *paperolles* also give us a very strong sense of how the body and repetitive activity have remained united. The object spills over into the maker, and she – the maker-subject – merges into her object. There is no barrier wall between the *paperolles* and the hands; there is only the intimate space of ‘instrumentality’ (which nowadays is also referred to in the arts as ‘agency’).²⁰ Once again, Tim Ingold describes this artistic contamination from the point of view of the bankruptcy of binary thinking in terms of nature and culture, or subject and object: ‘The world is not made up of subjects and objects, or even of quasi-subjects and quasi-objects. The problem lies not

so much in the sub- or the ob-, or in the dichotomy between them, as in the -ject. For the constituents of this world are not already thrown or cast before they can act or be acted upon. They are in the throwing, in the casting.²¹

In the '-ject', in the ontology of haptic fusion between the making body and the made object, these cylinders of parchment, fabric and silk thread constitute the physical carriers of memory: timelessly curled up between mankind and its successive generations. See how the secret will never allow itself to be unravelled again. The secret is a visible invisibility, the indefinable and thus the spiritual void so lovingly preserved by the *paperolles*.

In the Enclosed Gardens, the *paperolles* are arranged as building blocks of a wall, comparable to beads that form a screen or grid to cover the surface. These latticework structures can also be seen in contemporary miniatures by what is referred to as the Ghent-Bruges School. The patterns adorn the borders and margins and consist of several cells which can take different shapes such as triangles or rhombuses. They can be suggested in different ways by lines or by imitating the skills of goldsmiths.

However, this latticework structure acquires a spontaneous association with the trellis within the context of the garden. A trellis is an architectural structure, usually made from an open framework or lattice of interwoven or intersecting pieces of wood, bamboo or metal, which is normally made to support and display climbing plants. It was from the Middle Ages onwards that the rose trellis found particular popularity in Europe and other sites where roses were cultivated. Many climbing rose varieties require a trellis to achieve their potential as garden plants. The trellis was originally intended to support vines, and it is from such use that the Latin name derives: *trichila* or 'greenery bower'. Though it is unknown when and where the trellis was invented, literature and botanical works have referred to trellises throughout history. In the first and second centuries, Pliny the Younger (AD 62-113) wrote of trellises in some of his discourses on gardens. The trellis became an object of decoration and was entrusted to particular workers named *treillageurs*. They worked individually until 1769, when they joined the corporation of carpenters.²²

In the Mechelen Enclosed Gardens, the *paperolles* also provide both decorative and functional support for grapes, roses and miscellaneous

flowers. The flowers were often placed at the precise intersection of the *paperolles*. The overall result is a three-dimensional backdrop that fills the wall architecturally. It provides the Enclosed Gardens with dramatic tectonics between boundary and opening and between the opaque and diaphanous. 'Unfolded into three dimensions and repeated in vertical and horizontal directions, the grid does more than define the space of architecture – it turns into architecture.'²³ Indeed, the trellis allows visual contact between external and internal elements. It allows us to observe simultaneously the interior and exterior of a construction. The translucence of the plans permits a simultaneous reading of imbricated volumes.²⁴

The trellis of the Enclosed Garden defines the space and holds it together. It refers fundamentally to the principle of *taxis* (Greek for 'order', 'position' or 'rank'), which uses the grid pattern to denote (empty) space to be 'filled' or 'fixed' (Ill. 39).²⁵ Indeed, the grid is a technique or visual format for the paradoxical notion of 'present-absent space'. Consequently, it is particularly remarkable how, in this case, we can also see that Enclosed Gardens were employing ideas that we would consider contemporary or 'modern'. After all, it was precisely 'between the sixteenth and eighteenth century, [that] grid-shaped control [became] the universal practice that constitutes the basis of modern disciplinary societies.'²⁶ 'In other words, it [presupposed] the ability to write absence, that is, to deal equally efficiently with both occupied and empty spaces. This concept of place [was] thus inextricably tied to the notion of order. In return, it is impossible to conceive of this modern concept of order without a new understanding of place.'²⁷

One final matter still remains for us to consider with regard to 'agency' of the *paperolles*.

The *paperolles* wall employs scopic regimes that provide rhythm between wall, window and lattice. As far as is known, previous studies of the Enclosed Gardens have not yet elaborated how shrewdly these related regimes resonate in the erotic (spiritual) gaze of the Song of Songs. The Song of Songs 2:9-10 reads: 'Behold, there he stands behind our wall,²⁸ gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice. My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away".' Origen (AD 185-254) interpreted this teichoscopic passage of the Song of Songs as follows: 'The word



III. 39
Detail of the *paperolles* –
Garden with St Anne

of God, the bridegroom, is found not in the open courtyard but covered over and as if it were hiding behind the wall. He would enter like the lover, like an *erotikos*. He would first look through the window at the Bride. With a leap, he reaches the window of the house having in mind to peep at her. This is peeping *in the time* when she will unveil her face to go outside and find him.²⁹

To read the Song of Songs is to experience bliss. One cannot speak ‘about’ such a text; one can only speak ‘within’ such a text. The same applies to interpretation of the Enclosed Gardens: one has to enter into the space of the garden, or at least look over its wall, in order to understand. This entry into the paradise beyond the word by means of *teichoscopia* (gazing from the walls into the *horror*

vacui of flowers – visible provocations towards the invisible or the unspoken), is a force of energy as well as a dynamic between the garden and its maker/viewer.

The ensemble of *paperolles* forms the inner structure that prevents the garden from collapsing (the wall) and keeps the viewer’s eyes in place (the window). It allows the eye to ‘lock hook’ into the love space (lattice). In short, it spares the viewer from the prediction made by William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) in *The Second Coming*: ‘Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold.’³⁰

This brings me to the next section: the lozenge as a motif for the sacred cloth and the Heavenly Jerusalem.

**CLOTH AND
HEAVENLY
JERUSALEM**

The reason the lozenge pattern is charged with such energy can be explained by the fact that it is literally intertwined with the 'textile' medium: the

crossing of threads in such a way that a lozenge/net pattern becomes inherent to the cloth goes back to the Old Testament. The Book of Exodus (28:39) says that the Aaronic high priest should wear fine white linen with a chequer pattern: 'And thou shalt weave the coat in checker work of fine linen, and thou shalt make a mitre of fine linen, and thou shalt make a girdle, the work of the embroiderer.'

Also, the different textile curtains of the sanctuary in the tabernacle are associated with a special lozenge pattern, which was considered to be an especially refined technique, rich in the same way the lozenge pattern was later used in damask.³¹ The temple curtain features a lozenge membrane. By extension, the lozenge pattern is also a symbol of the Divine secret: the secret that is denoted exactly *because of its concealment*. The lozenge pattern is the perfect membrane of the sacral secret. Within the lozenge pattern, the ineffability is shifted to the archetype of potential, creative urge and the universe itself.

Since early Byzantine art, the iconography of the lozenge pattern has been attached to cloth, veils, clothing and curtains (often highlighted in gold), to either depict the cosmos and firmament, in a Marian context, or finally as a carrier of the true form of Christ. It will become apparent that these three Christian symbolic interpretations of the pattern are important for our interpretation of the Enclosed Gardens as yet another branch of the *longue durée* motif.³²

Herbert Kessler collected examples from ninth-century Byzantine manuscripts where goldwork textiles with a net pattern were used to show the Second Coming of Christ.³³ In an eleventh-century codex from St Catherine's Monastery, the concealing temple curtain consists of a lozenge pattern filled with lilies.³⁴ Herbert Kessler describes the pattern as being a formal support of the iconography of the cosmos, the firmament and, as a temple curtain, even an eschatological reference to the Heavenly Jerusalem and thus the return of Christ and the restoring of Paradise. In

some cases, the lozenge pattern is seen in connection with the brick wall, and thus with the structure of the masonry of the Heavenly Jerusalem, which immediately resonates with the Enclosed Gardens in our discourse (Ill. 40).³⁵

The Marian connotation is also quite important when it comes to the Enclosed Gardens. Mary weaves the temple curtain with precious purple wool. The textile arts and, by extension, handicrafts, such as those developed while making the Enclosed Gardens, were considered to be an *imitatio Mariae*. Like the Mother of God, the nun 'weaves' another part of the grand canvas of the heavenly *Ecclesia* itself. Enclosed Gardens are microfields with 'organisms' that keep up this task in an eschatological perspective. The nun spins Mary's endless thread throughout the generations and thus ensures a new incarnation time and time again. Each time, the nun's hands sing the praises of the miracle of a God become flesh, born of the body of a virgin like herself. The Gardens are like electrical boxes where the Marian exemplary spirituality is retained under the highest of voltages by means of the textile handicraft.

This brings me to the second important branch of the lozenge pattern as an energetically charged carrier of textile: the *acheiropietos*, or the face of Christ as an epiphany of God. Both the vera icon of the West as well as the prototypical Byzantine mandylion used textiles as a carrier (Ill. 41).³⁶ Textiles charged with a sacred veiling to show that which is invisible are transposed to the bestowed face of Christ. The figure of the Son, the New Covenant, has become visible; the face now floats in front of the woven curtain that conceals the Tabernacle of the Old Covenant. There is now a 'duality' of cloth and face, of old and new, of invisibility and visibility, both a Janus head on the threshold of a shared 'visible invisibility'.

In the Byzantine iconography, the mandylion often shows the lozenge pattern on damask, directly referencing the aforementioned triple layer of power of the biblical curtains on the one hand, and by extension the anthropological creation and fertility schemata (sublimated in Mary) on the other. The figurative visibility of the Son is thus literally able to attach itself in front of or on top of the cloth as an apparition, as well as a definition of a new pact between the invisible God of Moses and his visualisation in the Son. The face becomes



ILL. 40
Christ of the Parousia
with lozenge motif on
curtain behind,
9th century



ILL. 41
Mandylicon with
lozenge motif, John
Climacus and the Holy
ladder, manuscript
from Constantinople,
c. 1100?

a new organic manifestation of the primal secret of the Old Testament. The textile with net pattern is meant to incorporate the past, with its energy to continue the secret, but at the same time it functions as the perfect 'safety net' for showing-that-which-must-be-shown. The woven net pattern is the only membrane that is strong enough to show something as powerful as the face of God in the form of His son.³⁷

Back to the Enclosed Gardens. As a wall and membrane, as the carrier of a net that maintains and supports the gardens, the *paperolles* wall of the Paradise or the Heavenly Jerusalem is comparable with the new pact that the nun also makes at a micro level. The tight lozenge pattern is the aniconic, diagrammatic *écriture*, which is pregnant with the

full organic volume of that which shall appear *in front of* the curtain. The brooding microcosm of garden, relic, *eros* and *thanatos* is supported by a carrier that symbolises silence, secrets and safety. The lozenge pattern is necessary both to make the horticulture of this handicraft possible given the symbolism of the creation process, and to protect it when it comes to its charged meaning in the *longue durée*. That is why these gardens are feverish shrines, excessive sanctuaries. They are the new tabernacles, in which all shapes, all archetypal patterns, all elements of nature, all senses, all relics and all primal memories converge into one sacral choreography, in which they can implode to make a new abundant Magnificat for a Son born from a virgin.

**IN CONCLUSION:
MAKING / NESTS**

Can the Enclosed Gardens – on the basis of their contents of curiosities and relics, their treasuring of precious pearls, their function as a homelike shelter, their techniques of binding, knotting, sewing and gluing together, and finally their psycho-energetic and physical contamination with the maker’s body – just as easily be referred to as ‘nests’?

Tim Ingold wrote: ‘My aim is to restore things to life and, in so doing, to celebrate the creativity of what Paul Klee (1879-1940) called “form-giving”.³⁸ This means putting the hylomorphic model into reverse. More specifically, it means reversing a tendency, evident in much of the literature on art and material culture, to read creativity “backwards”, starting from an outcome in the form of a novel object and tracing it, through a sequence of antecedent conditions, to an unprecedented idea in the mind of an agent.’³⁹

In short, the further we venture from the binary models that have split apart art and the ‘made object’ into material and form, into culture and nature, and the deeper we then descend into the intermingling actions of the makers and the garden as a ‘living entity’, and – indeed – the more intimately that we enter within the Enclosed Garden as researchers and curators to examine even the very smallest of their curled *paperolles*, then the closer we are brought to this final paradigm that nature gives us ourselves: complex – artistic – intimate. The nest is not an end, but a new beginning for reading creativity ‘backwards’. The nest is not a separate ‘thing’; it is a body and the extension of the highest possible care that mankind requires. Yes, Enclosed Gardens are also nests for those reasons.

The word ‘nest’ is etymologically related to the notion of an Enclosed Garden through ‘niche’. The French word *niche* is most likely derived from the verb *nicher*, ‘to build a nest’, which in turn comes from Latin *nidicare* or *nidificare*, from *nidus* (‘nest’). Hence, the spatial connotation of niche emerged through formal similarities with the most intimate shell around something extraordinarily precious and fragile.

Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) writes in his *The Poetics of Space* about the nest: ‘The philosophical phenomenology of nests is being able to elucidate the interest with which we look through an album containing reproductions of nests or even more positively, in our capacity to recapture the naive wonder we used to feel when we found a nest. This wonder is lasting, and today when we discover a nest it takes us back to our childhood or, rather, to a childhood; to the childhoods we should have had. For not many of us have been endowed by life with the full measure of its cosmic implications.’⁴⁰

The dialectics between forest love and love in a city room is between wilderness and a nest – yes, between nature and the Enclosed Garden. A nest is never young; we come back, it is the sign of return and of daydreams.⁴¹ It is past and present.

In the nest and garden, the shelter built by and for the body is taking form from the inside, like a shell. It is a formal and performative intimacy that works physically. The body is exactly the right tool for making the nest. (This makes me refer to the curious fact that the same technique for the flower stitching is used with women’s hair. The making of female hair into a paradise-nest, is a mysterious metonymy for the bodily and performative gardens we are also studying.)

Bachelard adds that ‘the female, like a living tower, hollows out the house, while the male gender brings back from the outside all kinds of materials, sturdy twigs and other bits. By exercising an active pressure, the female makes this into a felt-like padding.’⁴² I quote from Jules Michelet’s (1798–1874) observations on birds: ‘The house is a bird’s very person; it is its form and its most immediate effort, I shall even say, its suffering. The result is only obtained by constantly repeated pressure of the breast. There is not one of these blades of grass that, in order to make it curve and hold the curve, has not been pressed on countless times by the bird’s breast, its heart, surely with difficulty in breathing, perhaps even with palpitations.’⁴³ ‘The form of the nest is commanded by the inside. On the inside the instrument that prescribes a circular form for the nest is nothing else but the body of the bird. It is by constantly turning around and around and pressing back the walls on every side by the bird’s belly that it succeeds in forming this circle.’⁴⁴

The nest is a swelling fruit, pressing against its limits. It is an expression of praise of its felt-like fabric.⁴⁵

So, maybe, after all, the daydream for the lost paradise with its typical anamnestic, melancholic and infinite tectonics constitutes the intimacy of the Enclosed Garden, yet, without ever losing its safety net or its limits, as an 'introjection of the boundaries of the world into the interior of the work. We deal with a mapping of the space inside the frame onto itself. It is a mode of repletion, the content of which is the conventional nature of art itself.'⁴⁶ Ultimately, any artistic act is about a fear of emptiness or absence, as Ulrike Gehring argues in her *Semantik der Absenz*:

'Der Wunsch, Unsichtbares sichtbar zu machen, ist der Kunst von Anbeginn an zu eigen. Bildenden Künstler verleihen ihren Ideen und Vorstellungen eine materiale Gestalt, indem sie unsichtbare Prozesse oder Empfindungen in die Antlitze ihrer bildlichen Stellvertreter einschreiben.'⁴⁷

It is precisely through this continuous desire for this phantasmal restoration that the fear of emptiness is conquered and that the absent is sublimated into artistic expression. This aspect, too, is contained in the making processes of the Enclosed Gardens: the garden as a nest that protects against emptiness and as a preparation for the final pact. This final pact is eschatological in nature, as it draws its significance from the ultimate expectation regarding the fulfilment of the promise: the absolute coincidence of the artistic image with the artificial image of God and the return to His Garden, His Paradise and the Heavenly Jerusalem. That is why the ultimate epistemology of Enclosed Gardens is the 'state of expectation' and the slow action of hands that are wrapping up, sewing, buttoning: the hands that take over the choreography of the waiting and incorporate it.

'Last night / I begged the Wise One to tell me / the secret of the world. / Gently, gently he whispered, / "Be quiet, / the secret cannot be spoken, / it is wrapped in silence";' sings Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-73).

The *paperolles* were never opened by the curators.

1 Barbara Baert, 'Echoes of Liminal Spaces. Revisiting the Late Mediaeval "Enclosed Gardens" of the Low Countries. (A Hermeneutical Contribution to Chthonic Artistic Expression),' in *Annual of the Antwerp Royal Museum 2012*, Paul Vandebroek, ed. (Antwerp: Antwerp Royal Museum, 2014/15), 9-46; Barbara Baert, *Late Medieval Enclosed Gardens of the Low Countries. Contributions to Gender and Artistic Expression*, Studies in Iconology 2 (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2016); Barbara Baert (with contribution from Hannah Iterbeke), 'Revisiting the Enclosed Gardens of the Low Countries (Fifteenth Century Onwards). Gender, Textile, and the Intimate Space as Horticulture,' *Textile: Cloth and Culture* 14 (2016): 1-30; Barbara Baert, 'Enclosed Garden: a Utopian and Mystical Sanctuary,' in *In Search of Utopia: Art and Science in the Era of Thomas More*, Jan Van der Stock, ed. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 49-53; Barbara Baert, 'Instrumentalities and the Late Medieval "Enclosed Gardens" in the Low Countries,' *Kunst og Kultur* 3 (2016): 132-141; Barbara Baert, Hannah Iterbeke and Lieve Watteeuw, 'Late Medieval Enclosed Gardens of the Low Countries. Mixed Media, Remnant Art, Récyclage and Gender in the Low Countries (16th century onwards),' in *The Agency of Things in Medieval and Early Modern Art: Materials, Power and Manipulation*, eds. Grażyna Jurkowlanec, Ika Matyjaszkiewicz and Zuzanna Sarnecka, (London: Routledge, 2017), 19-33; Barbara Baert, 'Art and Mysticism as Horticulture. Late Medieval Enclosed Gardens of the Low Countries in an Interdisciplinary Perspective,' in *Art and Mysticism. Interfaces in the Medieval and Modern Periods*, Louise Nelstrop and Helen Appleton (New York and London, Routledge, 2018): 104-127; Hannah Iterbeke, 'Leven in het besloten hof: De beeldcultuur en leefwereld van vrouwelijke religieuze gemeenschappen in de middeleeuwen en vroegmoderne tijd,' in *Van de wereld. Beelden van beslotenheid en bevrijding* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2017): 42-48. To reflect on the material life of the Enclosed Gardens and to gain knowledge about their sources and techniques, an interdisciplinary research and conservation project was established in 2014. Eight specialised conservator-restorers

were appointed to treat the complex objects (2014-18). Historic interventions reveal the nuns' ongoing care for the objects: overpainting statues (?18th century), adding protective glass in lead (early 19th century?), rewrapping the brocade silk paper rolls (*paperolles*) with linen (early 20th century), redecorating the damaged backing paper (late 19th or early 20th century) and fixing fallen artefacts with glue, nails and staples (mid-20th century). See: Joke Vandermeersch and Lieve Watteeuw, 'De conservering van de 16de-eeuwse Mechelse Besloten Hofjes. Een interdisciplinaire aanpak voor historische mixed media,' *Innovatie in de conservatie-restauratie. Postprints van de internationale BRK-APROA* 8 (2015): 41-52. Experience gained during the conservation of the Bentlager Reliquiengärten and the Enclosed Garden in the St Nicolai Kirche in Kalkar were a great inspiration for the Mechelen conservation team. See: Arnulf Von Ulmann, 'Die Restaurierung der Bentlager Reliquiengärten. Die Untersuchung,' *Westfalen. Hefte für Geschichte, Kunst und Volkskunde* 77, I (1999): 114-136; Stephan Brunnert, Gudrun Hildebrandt, Richard Moroz, Annik Pietsch and Frauke Wenzel, 'Die Restaurierung der Reliquiengärten aus Kloster Bentlage,' *Westfalen. Hefte für Geschichte Kunst und Volkskunde* 77, I (1999): 137-173; Reinhard Karrenbrock and Marc Peez, 'Die "besloten hofjes" in St Nicolai in Kalkar,' *Jahrbuch der rheinischen Denkmalpflege* 44 (I) (Worms: Wernersche Verlagsgesellschaft, 2014): 118-146; Martin Hammer and Gisela Hauck, 'Ein "besloten hofje" aus dem Johannesaltar in St Nicolai in Kalkar,' *Jahrbuch der rheinischen Denkmalpflege* 44, I (Worms: Wernersche Verlagsgesellschaft, 2014), 147-172.

2 Such is the case for the now-lost reliquary garden of the Leliëndaal cloister in Mechelen. See: Hannah Iterbeke, 'Cultivating Devotion: The Sixteenth-Century Enclosed Gardens of the Low Countries,' in *IKON. Journal of Iconographic Studies* 10 (2017): 243.

3 Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. 'quilling,' consulted 21 September 2017, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/156550?redirectedFrom=quilling#eid>

4 Caroline W. Bynum, *Christian Materiality. An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2011).

Also of interest is: Sören Kaspersen and Ulla Haastrup, eds., *Images of Cult and Devotion. Function and Reception of Christian Images in Medieval and Post-Medieval Europe* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2004).

5 Paul Vandenbroeck, *Hooglied. De Beeldwereld van religieuze Vrouwen in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden, vanaf de 13de eeuw* (Brussels-Ghent: Paleis voor Schone Kunsten/Snoeck-Ducaju, 1994); Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Jeffrey F. Hamburger, 'Body vs. Book: The Trope of Visibility in Images of Christian-Jewish Polemic,' in *Ästhetik des Unsichtbaren. Bildtheorie und Bildgebrauch in der Vormoderne*, David Ganz & Thomas Lentz, eds. (Berlin: Reimer, 2004), 113-145; Jeffrey F. Hamburger & Robert Suckale, 'Zwischen Diesseits und Jenseits. Die Kunst der geistlichen Frauen im Mittelalter,' in *Krone und Schleier. Kunst aus mittelalterlichen Frauenklöstern*, Jutta Frings, ed. (München: Hirmer, 2005), 21-39. See also: Jean-Claude Schmitt, ed., *Femmes, art et religion au Moyen Âge* (Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2004).

6 For some nuanced points of view within the methodologically rigorous division between so-called profane and sacred space, see: Diana Webb, 'Domestic space and devotion in the Middle Ages,' in *Defining the Holy. Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Andrew Spicer and Sarah Hamilton, eds. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 27-48.

7 On the ambiguous typology of Enclosed Gardens within the phenomenon of the relic, the curiosity, the fetish and, by extension, research into what is a 'remnant' and what is an 'object' see: Stefan Laube, *Von der Reliquie zum Ding. Heiliger Ort - Wunderkammer - Museum* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 31. As put by Stefan Laube: 'Fragen drängen sich auf: Galten die Objekte als sakral oder eher als profan? Durfte das kuriose oder fremde Objekt ausgefallen bleiben, oder wurden darauf biblische oder dogmatische Bedeutungen projiziert?' See also: Tristan Weddigen, 'Resteverwertung,' *Kritische Berichte (Rest, Fetisch, Reliquie)* 36 (3) (2008): 6: 'Der Kunstwissenschaft zu bedenken gibt, ob sie nicht ebenfalls an

der Veredlung von Resten zu Fetischen und Reliquien beteiligt ist.' See also: Allison Stielau, 'The Case of the Case for Early Modern Objects and Images,' *Kritische Berichte (Die Kunst und die Dinge. Perspektiven einer schwierigen Beziehung)* 39 (3) (2011): 5. Stileau states: 'As an object meant to embrace another object, the etui sits in an undefined interstice between received categories. It is not comfortably a work of art. Nor, when ornamented and carefully crafted, can it be placed in the vast category of functional objects known as "material culture".'

8 Kathryn M. Rudy, *Virtual Pilgrimages in the Convent. Imagining Jerusalem in the Late Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 110-118.

9 Rudy, *Virtual Pilgrimages*, 114.

10 Tim Ingold, 'The Textility of Making,' *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 34 (2010): 92.

11 Chris Gosden, 'What do objects want?,' *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 12, 3 (2005): 193-211; Ingold, 'Textility,' 92.

12 Ingold, 'Textility,' 92.

13 Tim Ingold, 'Bauen Knoten Verbinden,' *Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturforschung* 6, 1 (2015): 85.

14 Tim Ingold and Elizabeth Hallam, 'Making and Growing: An Introduction,' in *Making and Growing. Anthropological Studies of Organisms and Artefacts*, Anthropological Studies of Creativity and Perception 7, Elizabeth Hallam and Tim Ingold, eds. (London: Routledge, 2016), 1.

15 Ibid.

16 It should be noted that reliquary gardens were not solely fashioned by religious women. Even in the case of the Mechelen Gardens, some objects, such as the wooden case or the polychrome sculptures, were made by professional craftsmen. Consequently, the extent of the hospital sisters' involvement in the initial creation of these Enclosed Gardens remains uncertain. For example, we know of Enclosed Gardens designed and crafted by laymen, such as the Enclosed Garden that once stood at St James' Church in Antwerp. However, as already mentioned in note 1, the nuns did actively work on these gardens for almost 500 years.

17 Today, these divisions between artefacts and organisms, or between what is made and what grows, are being

increasingly challenged in fields ranging from contemporary art to biomedicine. See: Ingold and Hallam, 'Making and Growing,' 14.

18 As put by Daston and Park: 'Indeed, one has already shown how in early modern Europe, the realms of art and nature were closely intertwined, and even merged for example in the *Wunderkammern* (chambers of wonder) in which the wealthy housed their precious objects and materials. Here the rare, strange and intricate mingled with metaphoric entities such as coral, described by Ovid as a sea plant petrified by the blood dripping from Medusa's severed head.' See: Lorraine J. Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonder and the Order of Nature. 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 273; Ingold and Hallam, 'Making and Growing,' 18. See also the essay by Hannah Iterbeke in this volume.

19 My special thanks to Joke Vandermeesch for sharing her expertise on these rolls. The first type is very similar to the *reliquienpäckchens* as seen in the Kalkar Enclosed Garden. See: Hammer and Hauck, 'Ein "besloten hofje" aus dem Johannesaltar,' 148-150.

20 Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency. An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2007), 83-90.

21 Ingold, 'Textility,' 95.

22 'Treillage,' Wikipedia, last modified February 24, 2017, <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treillage>; Hubert Beylier and Bénédicte Leclerc, *Treillage de jardin du XIV au XX siècle* (Paris: Editions du Patrimoine, 2000), 172-173.

23 Bernhard Siegert, *Cultural Techniques. Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*, Meaning Systems 22, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 116.

24 Jean-Max Albert, *L'espace de profil* (Paris: Les Éditions de La Villette, 1993).

25 Siegert, *Cultural Techniques*, 97: 'Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* introduces *taxis* as a fundamental cultural technique of the economic domain. *Taxis* refers to an order of things in which each and every object is located in a fixed place where it can be found. However, humans differ from things. "When you are searching for a person," Xenophon cautions, "you often fail to find him,

though he may be searching for you himself. Humans defy the fundamental rules of economy because for them 'no place of meeting has been fixed.'" This modern *taxis* is implemented by means of a new cultural technique which takes into account that something may be missing from its place. In other words, it encompasses the notion of an empty space.' The technique in question is the grid or lattice; Xenophon, *Memorabilia and Oeconomicus*, trans. E. C. Marchant (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938), 439.

26 Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Sean Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 34.

27 Bernhard Siegert, *Cultural Techniques*, 97. See also: Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Séan Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 34.

28 Teichoscopy or *teichoscopia*, meaning 'viewing from the walls', is a recurring narrative strategy in Ancient Greek literature. One famous instance of teichoscopy occurs in Homer's *Iliad*, Book 3, verses 121-244. *Teichoscopia* makes it possible to describe an event taking place in the distance while integrating it into the narrative frame.

29 Patricia Cox Miller, 'Pleasure of the Text, Text of Pleasure. Eros and Language in Origen's "Commentary on the Song of Songs";' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 54, 2 (1986): 241-253; Henri Couzel, *Origène et la Connaissance Mystique* (Bruges: Desclée De Brouwer, 1961). On biblical hermeneutics and *lire au-delà du verset* according to Emmanuel Lévinas (1906-1995), see: Marc-Alain Ouaknin, *Lire aux éclats. Éloge de la caresse* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 37, 136, 283. The word 'window' originates from the Old Norse *vindauga*, from *vindr*, 'wind', and *auga*, 'eye'; that is, 'wind eye'.

30 After William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) in his *The Second Coming*, 1919.

See: William Butler Yeats, *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (Churchtown: The Chuala Press, 1920).

31 Herbert L. Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing. Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 53-54.

32 Many thanks to Roland Krischel, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum and Fondation Corboud, who alerted me to this fact

during the workshop at IKKM Weimar, entitled: 'Excessive Spaces. Considering Media Genealogies of Trompe-l'œil in Netherlandish Book Illumination and Early Still Lifes', which took place on 21-22 January 2016; Roland Krischel, 'Ein "vergiftetes" Meisterwerk? Theologie und Ideologie im Altar der Stadtpatrone,' in *Kölner Domblatt* 80 (2015): 1-100, notes 250-253.

33 Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing*, 53-54.

34 Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing*, 53-54, 57-59, images 3.3, 3.4. See also: Herbert L. Kessler, 'Medieval Art as Argument,' in *Iconography at the Crossroads. Papers from the Colloquium sponsored by the Index of Christian Art, Princeton University, 23-24 March 1990*, Index of Christian Art, Occasional Papers 2, Brendan Cassidy, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 63-64.

35 Herbert L. Kessler, 'Il mandylion,' in *Il volto di Cristo*, Giovanni Morello and Gerhard Wolf, eds. (Milan: Electa, 2000), 74.

36 Kessler, 'Il mandylion,' 93. See also: Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing*, colour image IVb.

37 Barbara Baert, 'The Gendered Visage. Facets of the Vera Icon,' in *Annual of the Antwerp Royal Museum 2000*, Paul Vandebroek, ed. (Antwerp: Antwerp Royal Museum, 2000), 10-43.

38 Paul Klee, *Notebooks, Volume 2: The Nature of Nature*, trans. H. Norden, ed. J. Spiller (London: Lund Humphries, 1975), 269.

39 Ingold, 'Textility,' 97.

40 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas et al. (New York: Penguin, 2014), 114.

41 *Ibid.*, op. cit., 119.

42 *Ibid.*, op. cit., 121.

43 Jules Michelet, *L'oiseau* (Paris: Hachette, 1858), 208.

44 *Ibid.*

45 Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, op. cit., 122.

46 Rosalind Krauss, 'Grids,' *October* 9 (1979): 59.

47 Ulrike Gehring, ed., 'Semantik der Absenz. The Making and Meaning of the Void,' *Kritische Berichte* 39, 2 (2011), 3.



MATERIALS AND ARTEFACTS

The Enclosed Gardens consist of an amalgam of art objects and materials. They are filled with plants and animals in silk, parchment, cherry stones and metal wire, wax Agnus Dei, metal pilgrim badges, miniatures and inscriptions on parchment, prints on paper, different types of glass beads, coral, amber, bone, rock crystal, bone relics, and polychrome sculptures (*poupées de Malines*). The Gardens became richer and richer as layers of history, memory and meaning accumulated. Although they were probably crafted by the nuns, it is likely that experienced craftsmen played a significant role in their complex genesis.

III. 42

Lily made of parchment,
silk and metal wire,
with small pearls at the
extremities – Garden with
the Hunt of the Unicorn

Materials and Materiality. Unravelling the Enclosed Gardens

LIEVE WATTEEUW

ILL. 43
Detail of a rosebud in
silk, metal wire and
parchment – Garden
with Daniel in the
Lions' Den



Sculptures and silk flowers adorned the cloistered rooms of the Mechelen Augustinian nuns for centuries: placed within a wooden case, flowers and statues (the major part of the various assembled objects) elaborately covered every square centimetre.¹ Each individual object, between 200 and 400 in each wooden case, materialised the desire of the hospital sisters for unity with Christ in prayer; together, the objects stimulated piety and devotion.² This essay will focus on the great variety of objects, materials and artefacts that found their way into the Enclosed Gardens. By unravelling their sources and history, materials and materiality, matter and physicality, their creation will be explored.³ This approach, focused on the material, is based on a close historical reading of the objects and conservation data combined with material analyses (Ill. 43).⁴

THE GARDEN

The Gardens as hybrid retables contain complex material arrangements: late medieval mixed-media, presenting a diversity of craftsmanship rarely seen in the first part of the sixteenth century. They were made and kept in and around the convent of the Augustinian nuns inside the city walls of Mechelen, a few streets away from the palace of Margaret of Austria, governess of the Netherlands. Margaret's residence was richly decorated with textiles, paintings, antiquities and devotional objects... she certainly possessed one Enclosed Garden. Her library contained gorgeously illuminated Books of Hours for private devotion.⁵ In emulation of the luxurious environment of the pious regent, the domestic altars in the cells of the hospital nuns incorporated and simulated a related materiality needed for their contemplation and devotion. Agnus Dei medallions, relics and badges referred to places of pilgrimage. The Gardens, or *Hoffes*, were microcosms of the wider devotional world for the hospital sisters, whose main duty was the care of the sick and elderly and managing the hospital mission. The Hospital of Our Lady near the river Dyle had no library, and time for studying must have been limited, although the nuns were certainly literate.⁶ The monastery possessed two actual gardens for cultivation inside the monastery walls, one close to the pharmacy and brewery, and a large

meadow close to the hospital rooms.⁷ This area had a kitchen garden, an infirmary garden and an orchard, for the cultivation of fruits, berries, flowers and medical herbs.⁸ The sisters maintained the gardens as part of their daily tasks, so that the Enclosed Gardens reflected not only the interior world of prayer, but also the exterior world of labour.

RECYCLING AND REUSE OF MATERIALS IN THE ENCLOSED GARDENS

The small wooden religious sculptures in the Paradise Gardens, the so-called *poupées de Malines*, were produced and admired in Mechelen from the late fifteenth century on. Some of the numerous objects surrounding the *poupées* are made of very valuable materials such as silk, silver and coral. Such materials could be purchased in a city with a diverse economic and artistic environment, since they were needed by luxury dressmakers, tapestry weavers, jewellers/goldsmiths, embroiderers and the makers of passementerie (trimmings, such as ribbons, braids, cords and tassels). But most of the objects in the Gardens were extremely creative combinations of very common and inexpensive raw materials: brass, tin, paper, parchment, pipe clay, glass, seeds, fruit stones and wood. Moreover, cost was kept down by recycling artefacts and materials, the main source of luxuries for 'dressing' the Gardens. The recycling of small items and fabrics in the Gardens ensured an afterlife for the original objects. In this way the Enclosed Gardens became memory boxes for those who meditated in front of them. Converted into memorials to their previous owners and their piety, they became in the rooms of the convent symbols of memory, distanced by time. Within their religious and spiritual practices, the Augustinian sisters cultivated the afterlife of these objects, so that many artefacts in the Gardens significantly predate the creation of the Gardens themselves.

The numerous older relics housed in the Gardens were especially important vehicles of memory.⁹ Their spiritual and material substances were linked to miraculous places or powers. Relics and pilgrim badges referred to distant places, to which the Augustinian nuns themselves could



Ill. 44

Jawbone relic wrapped in a red velvet silk sleeve decorated with beads – Garden with St Ursula

Ill. 45

Jawbone relic at the feet of Christ as a gardener (*noli me tangere*) – Garden with St Ursula

never travel, so that they embodied the ‘virtual pilgrimage’. These representations of sacred places, persons and events were embedded in the network of memories in the Gardens.¹⁰ The relics could have been purchased by the Augustinian nuns on the ‘market’, or presented to them from disassembled relic shrines by sister monasteries; gifts of relics could have come from patrons and patients.¹¹ Most of the bones and stones (topographic relics, such as a little rock from Mount Golgotha) in the Gardens are too small to evaluate, except for a large jawbone relic at the base near the feet of ‘Christ as gardener’ in the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2) (Ill. 44 and 45). The jawbone was examined in 2018 in KIK-IRPA and dated to between 770 and 970 AD by C14.¹² Its appearance in the Garden created in Mechelen can be explained by its relocation from an older shrine (such as the bones and skulls of St Ursula and her companions venerated in the Golden Chamber of the Basilica of St Ursula in Cologne), through its purchase from the flourishing relic market or as a gift.¹³

Precious stones or gems are completely absent in the Gardens, except for two large rock crystals, one in the *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions’ Den* (G4) and one in the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1).¹⁴ They might have been recycled from relic holders or precious book covers. One cabochon crystal over a small miniature of the Virgin in Garden 1 visually enlarges and protects the image (Ill. 50).¹⁵ Some smaller crystals are accompanied by brass, glass, pearl, coral or amber beads, for example to create the heart of a silk flower (G1).¹⁶ Gold and silver are incorporated in the numerous metal threads used in the decoration: silver or gilded silver on intestinal membranes, S-twisted around a textile core made of flax.¹⁷ Delicate small silvered pearls embellish the ends of the flower petals (Ill. 47).¹⁸ The twenty-two pilgrim badges in the Gardens are almost all made of leaded brass; only four are silver.¹⁹ The original decorative paper covering the back panels of the wooden cases of the *Garden with St Ursula* (G2) and the *Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3) has a layer of tinfoil; now oxidised dark grey, originally it would have had the effect of gleaming silver, at a far lower cost (Ill. 57).²⁰





Lit' vanden maghe
vanden ri' medem





asala

ILL. 46 (pages 96–97)
Detail of St Elisabeth
amid relics, a pilgrim
badge and *paperolles* –
Garden with St Ursula

**MAKING
PAPEROLLES
AND FLOWERS**

The quantity of materials needed for all the Garden artefacts was not enormous, as most objects were small. During the creation of the Gardens, uniformity was apparently not an issue, since diversity and variety seem to have been deliberate. Materials, such as high-quality ungummed silk, could easily be sourced from the scraps and remnants left over from the production of other artefacts by the Mechelen guilds.²¹ Parchment fragments (used for the interior of flowers) could have been purchased from a nearby scriptorium – the small strips of parchment could be the trimmings left after cutting a skin into leaves. In the *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4), a manuscript was reused inside the blue flowers close to Christ.²² Occasionally, the interior material of the flowers was a simple brownish cardboard.²³

In the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, silk textiles, such as velvet, taffeta and lampas, were exclusive and expensive materials for clothing the elite.²⁴ The presence of the court in Mechelen would require the presence of such precious textiles.²⁵ As the quantity of materials needed for the Gardens was small, some of the small fragments are reused or recycled fabrics. These could have been gifts from the wealthy to the monastery.²⁶ It had long been usual for valuable aristocratic garments to be given to the church to be made into liturgical vestments. Small fragments of red velvet were especially used for covering the lozenge motifs and pedestals in the Gardens – as in Garden 4. The difference in texture and red dye between the fragments, ranging from redwood, madder and kermes to Mexican cochineal, documents the widely different provenances of the textiles. Moreover, the bright red cochineal dye of the satin fragment used for covering the *paperolles* (the rolled cylinders of paper or parchment) and the pedestal of the Virgin (the sculpture on the right) is evidence for a date in the mid sixteenth century.²⁷

Other textile fragments are centuries older. Small pieces of woven silk damask, recovered from garments, furnishings or relic bags, were reused to cover the *paperolles*, giving the ensemble a rich variety of motif, texture and colour (Ill. 58). Under the silk covering, the *paperolles* are made from a rolled sheet of rough brown paper.²⁸

**WAX AGNUS DEI,
BLESSED AMULETS**

The Agnus Dei wax medallions in the Enclosed Gardens were brought from Rome, as they were only available there.²⁹ Considered sacramental objects, they were made in the first and the seventh year of a papal reign from the previous year's Paschal candles. A great prophylactic power was attributed to these representations of the Lamb bearing the flag of the Resurrection: they were believed to destroy sins and augment virtue, safeguard women during childbirth and protect against plague and epilepsy (Ill. 47). The reverse bears the name and/or coats of arms of the ruling pope. Melted beeswax, holy water, chrism (holy oil) and balsam were the basic materials. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, beeswax for candles was a very expensive material and only used in the church liturgy; normal domestic lighting was done with candles made of tallow or animal fat.³⁰ It was customary to protect the highly valued but fragile wax Agnus Dei in pendants of gold, copper-alloy, lead or silver, so that they could be carried for protection and blessing.³¹ Not surprisingly, they were thought appropriate in Mechelen household altars; in the Gardens they are mounted in the middle of the lozenge *paperolles* on alum-tanned leather decorated with embroidery and glass pearls.

In the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1), a very small Agnus Dei, attached to a brass roundel, within a grid of silver thread, is made from the grey 'Paste de S.S. Martiri'.³² This material contains beeswax mingled with pulverised bones and dust derived from early Christian saints buried in the Roman catacombs. In this way the wax Agnus Dei became more than talismans, since they became true relics. This Agnus Dei was made during the papacy of Leo X, born Giovanni di Lorenzo de' Medici, and therefore either in 1513 or 1520.³³ The superb Agnus Dei in the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2), depicting Christ rising from the tomb,³⁴ is dated 1513, the first Easter of Leo X's papacy.³⁵ There are also Agnus Dei painted on parchment, as found in the *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4).³⁶ These small roundels with miniature paintings (diameter 27 mm) are protected by a thin sheet of glass and surrounded with a twisted coil of silver or metal wire. They are hung like glass drops on the lozenge branches.



**REUSING PRAYER
BEADS AND
ROSARIES**

The flowers and ornamented discs in the Enclosed Gardens are unobtrusively but lavishly decorated with hundreds of tiny beads made from a wide range of materials.³⁷ They are essential parts of the flowers, the medallions and the ornamentation of the relics. Attached by wrapping metal and silver threads to the supporting objects, they are subtle but essential components of the Gardens. The use of materials in these beads is very diverse: rock crystal, glass paste, metal, polychromed wood, bone, mother-of-pearl, coral, horn, amber, ivory, seeds, nut kernels and fruit pits (Ill. 55).³⁸ Their shape is generally round, but more oval faceted or shaped beads are also present; their dimensions vary from one to a few millimetres. For fashion and garments, a wide

variety of beads became available to buy in the late Middle Ages. Beads made by *perelgaters*, which were also needed for strings of prayer beads and rosaries – which developed around that time³⁹ – could be bought new in the shops of the *meerseniers* (mercers).⁴⁰

Recycling small quantities of beads was certainly an important way to create artefacts for the Gardens. A small number of any one sort of bead, too small for general use, was ideal for incorporating as ‘ready-mades’ into the installations. When strings of beads and rosaries broke and became incomplete, the remaining beads could be integrated into the Gardens.⁴¹ Yellow amber beads are used in various contexts, for example for the berries in the fence of the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6).⁴² Beads of red coral (*Corallium rubrum*) were used to create red berries in the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn*

ILL. 47

Wax Agnus Dei sewn on to a leather disc, hemmed with silk embroidery and beads – Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn



ILL. 48
The Christ Child in *papier-pressé* (cartonnage) with a basketful of apples – Garden with St Anne

ILL. 49
The Christ Child in pipe clay and gauze textile – Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den



(G1).⁴⁵ Mother of pearl (nacre) beads were used to decorate the petals of the flowers. Pearls became highly fashionable around 1500 and were obtained through the most important centres of the pearl trade, Lisbon and Seville.

But the nearby convent garden also provided all kinds of material to create artefacts: cherry stones were used for grapes, and the claw of a small domestic animal (possibly a cat) became the beak of the peacock in the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) (see Ill. 93, p. 158).

DEVOTIONAL FIGURES IN MOULDED PAPER AND PIPE CLAY

Three of the Enclosed Gardens contain a total of twenty-three small paper bas-reliefs, each depicting a seated Christ Child with a basket of apples and measuring about

29 by 17 mm (Ill. 48).⁴⁴ The image of Christ with the apple basket refers to the tree in the Garden of Eden. The reliefs are made of cartonnage – recycled paper pulp combined with textile fibres or *papier-pressé* – which was a cheaper substitute for wooden or plaster objects. Recycled rags and other fibrous materials were mixed with the paper pulp for strength, boiled in water and squeezed dry to obtain a workable mixture. The material was then either air-dried or baked into flat sheets or cast (*matrijs*) in shaped moulds made from pipe clay, wood or terracotta.⁴⁵ The little Christ figures have been delicately painted, with variations for each figure, and finished with small touches of shell-gold and -silver.⁴⁶

There are some early contemporary sources on the use of this *papier-pressé* technique: the Tournai painters' regulations of 1480 mentions *travail de 'papierrie'*, three-dimensional artefacts and masks in moulded paper made for such purposes as tournaments, festivals, celebrations, theatricals etc.⁴⁷ Moulded paper reliefs were also found in the church of Wienhausen in northern Germany, under the floor of the nuns' choir.⁴⁸ Other sources for the production of *papier-pressé* in Mechelen are documented in the middle of the sixteenth century, when the technique was used for the elaborate frames of the sought-after alabaster bas-reliefs.⁴⁹

Similarly, two medallions (*patacons* or painted pipe-clay disks) and a small sculpture of a Christ

Child moulded in pipe clay were alternatives for the more time-intensive figures sculpted from wood.⁵⁰ These are found in the *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4) (Ill. 49). The small straight figure of the newly born Child, with nimbus, unpainted and wrapped in a thin gauze, measures c. 40 mm and is mounted on a red silk support. These small, fully rounded, pipe-clay figures in *plaester* were produced in great quantities for devotion in the home. Their makers are referred to in the Antwerp guild regulations (*Liggeren*), as *beeldenbakkers* or *Jesusbakker*.⁵¹ Archeological finds in Mechelen, in the Elisabeth beguinage and the Convent of Bethany, prove that the popular pipe-clay figures were produced and circulated in the city.⁵² They were probably carried for their prophylactic value, like the pilgrim badges and Agnus Dei medallions, and made their way to the Gardens through the health-care work of the hospital sisters.

DEVOTIONAL IMAGES ON TÜCHLEIN AND IN ENAMEL

At the top of the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1), under the Cross and the image of the wounds of Christ painted on parchment, is a small depiction of the Virgin and Child in an open landscape painted on linen (Ill. 50).⁵³ For cloth paintings or *tüchlein*, a glue-based medium was used, made by boiling animal skin mixed with other organic tissue. The colours used for this simple image of the Virgin are white, blue and green, with black to create the outlines of the figure. For display in the Garden, the painting was glued behind a glass disk to stabilize the shape and to protect the fragile colours. *Tüchlein* paintings were common in this period, but few survive because of their fragility.

ILL. 50
Crystal cabochon with miniature of the Madonna and Child – Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn





Ill. 51
Small enamel medallion of the Virgin and Child – Garden with Daniel in the Lions’ Den

Almost invisible in the *Enclosed Garden of the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) and the *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions’ Den* (G4), hanging above and disappearing among the foliage, are very small enamels depicting the Virgin and Child, Christ or saints.⁵⁴ They are mounted in brass medallions, measuring c. 10 mm in diameter and of varying shapes: lozenge, star, roundel or heart (Ill. 51).⁵⁵ The tiny figures are executed with black outlines and roughly heightened with basic colours such as yellow, green and red. Three of the medallions are on a red ground. Most probably these small objects originally functioned as talismanic images that could be attached to a rosary or worn on the person; they were subsequently integrated into the Gardens by the hospital sisters.⁵⁶

WRAPPED PEAT

When all the objects had been made or collected, it was necessary to provide a base into which they could be planted, pricked or pinned. The bases of the Enclosed Gardens are made of peat, also known as ‘brown gold’ because it was the most common fuel for household heating. In Mechelen there was a corporation of *turfdraggers* (*turfdraggersnering*).⁵⁷ The base of the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) is made of eleven blocks of peat, measuring c. 13.5 cm to 16.5 cm, 11 cm deep and

6 to 8 cm high. The blocks were cut and covered, first in linen and then in fine green silk, stitched to the linen with blue linen thread (Ill. 52 and 54). Historical data on peat extraction in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Flanders shows that the main source was in northern Flanders, along the left bank of the Western Scheldt Estuary, where huge stocks of peat were found. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, most of the peat used as household fuel was imported from Holland. Mechelen, located on the river Dyle, was a transit port, so considerable quantities of peat reached the city. We can assume that the interior of the monastery in Mechelen was heated with similar blocks of peat.

CONCLUSIONS

The use of multiple materials, in surprising combinations, make the Gardens hybrid and mysterious. The recycling of elements was intentional, motivated not by the scarcity of raw materials, but by the desire to give the materials a new context in the house-altars. The Enclosed Gardens are an amalgamation of sources and objects. The Gardens became ever richer as they brought different layers of history, memory and meanings together. Some new elements, such as the flowers decorated with beads, could have been made by the nuns, but skilled craftsman from the guild of embroiderers or passementerie makers might have played a large part in their complex creation. The decisions on the layout and iconography came without doubt from the minds and hands of the Augustinians themselves. The recycling was guided by a spiritual symbolism appropriate to the Augustinian nuns who treasured the gifts of the sick, the devout and pilgrims. Recycling was a part of the medieval (re-) creative process, a part of composing the religious *wunderkammer*.

These unique cabinets of curiosities remained almost intact thanks to their particular role within the monastery. For centuries they were objects of veneration and focuses for prayer, but, as the years went by, even the sisters and the historians lost knowledge of their full meaning.

1 Previous literature on the Enclosed Gardens has been imprecise on the type, materials and numbers of objects assembled in them. The recent research and conservation project revealed a greater number and variety of artefacts than was previously recorded. For example, the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3), one of the larger Gardens, has: 3 wooden polychrome sculptures, 36 *paperolles*, 21 decorative discs in brass, c. 50 silk flowers, c. 27 silk plant elements, 9 pilgrim badges, 5 relics, 10 parchment text banderoles (*cedulae* or *authentiques*) and 3 independent parchment elements mounted on wood for the fence and the gate. Furthermore, all these parts are attached and fixed to one another and to the wooden case with 23 forged nails, wooden pins and hundreds of metal threads through holes in the wooden panels. The bottom of the case is composed of 11 blocks of peat, covered with green silk. While all Enclosed Gardens have been added to over the years, most of their contents date from the first part of the 16th century or earlier. No archival records relating to their production in Mechelen are known, as these archives in Mechelen were destroyed.

2 Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998); W. Keane, 'The Evidence of the Senses and the Materiality of Religion,' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 14 (2008), 110–127; *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*, ed. D. Morgan (London: Routledge, 2010); C.W. Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2011); Barbara Baert, Hannah Iterbeke and Lieve Watteeuw, 'Late Medieval Enclosed Gardens of the Low Countries, Mixed Media, Remnant Art, Récyclage and Gender in the Low Countries (16th century onwards),' *The Agency of Things, Materials, Power and Manipulation*, eds. Grażyna Jurkowlaniec, Ika Matyjaszkiewicz and Zuzanna Sarnecka (New York: Routledge, 2018), 19–33. With further references and bibliography. See also the essay by Barbara Baert in this volume, pp. 78–89.

3 More information on the materiality and construction of the Enclosed Gardens can be found in the essay on their conser-

vation in this volume, pp. 218–248. See: Joke Vandermeersch, Hilde Weissenborn, Lieve Watteeuw with contributions from Anne-Sophie Augustyniak, Jean-Albert Glatigny, Derek Binon, Justine Marchal and Sarah Benrubi, *The Conservation and Restoration of the Seven Enclosed Gardens of Mechelen (2014–2018)*. I would also like to thank the members of the ArtGarden project (Belspo 2016–2020): the team from KIK-IRPA (Marjolijn Debulpaep, Marina Van Bos, Willemien Anaf and Ina Vandenberghe), the team of AXES, University of Antwerp (Karolien de Wael, Patrick Storme and Andrea Marchetti) and my colleagues from the KU Leuven: Bruno Vandermeulen, Dieter Daemen, Hannah Iterbeke and Hendrik Hameeuw. Special thanks to Lorne Campbell, Dagmar Eichberger, Frieda Sorber, Barbara Baert, Bart Stroobants, Wim Hüsken and Elly Cockx-Indesteghe and Catherine Reynolds for sharing information.

4 Giving complete descriptions of all the artefacts in the Gardens was not possible in this essay. Although some elements remain unexplained, the most significant artefacts have already revealed important information. The research is still ongoing and the results of the ArtGarden project (Belspo, 2016–2020) will be published in full in 2021.

5 Kathryn Rudy, 'Women's Devotion in Mechelen,' *Women of Distinction. Margaret of York / Margaret of Austria*, ed. Dagmar Eichberger (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2005), 231–239.

6 It is noteworthy that all the texts on the banderoles accompanying the relics in the Gardens are in Dutch; the text written on the fence of the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) is in Latin: *Tu es hortus cunctis deliciis affluens multisque divitiis, nullis umquam tactus spurcitiis gignens florem reffectum gratiis.*

7 For the establishment of the monastery of the Augustinian nuns (known as *Gasthuiszusters*) in the Hospital of Our Lady in Mechelen, see: De Nijn et al., *800 jaar Onze-Lieve-Vrouwegasthuis. Uit het erfgoed van de Mechelse gasthuiszusters en het OCMW* (exhib. cat., Mechelen: Stedelijk Museum, 1998); St Vandenberghe, 'Opgravingen en vondsten. Oudheidkundige vondsten in de tuinen van het O-L-V Gasthuis te Mech-

elen,' 185-197, *Handelingen van de Koninklijke Kring voor Oudheidkunde, Letteren en Kunst van Mechelen*, 72th tome, edited by Koninklijke Kring voor Oudheidkunde, Letteren en Kunst van Mechelen, (Mechelen, 1968). See also the map 'Grondplan van O.L.V. Gasthuis 1784, door de nonnen verlaten in oktober 1857', Stadsarchief Mechelen, Iconografie.

8 According to the plan from the late 18th century, before the monastery building were destroyed, the square garden near the pharmacy was enclosed and divided into four parts, surrounded with hedges and crossed with small paths – the traditional ground plan for medieval monastic gardens. In the four rectangular divisions, most probably herbs, flowers and plants were grown in raised beds, as the medicinal or infirmary garden would be an important resource for the hospital's treatments. As was usual, the garden would have been created and maintained by the nuns. See: Carole Rawcliffe, 'Hospital Nurses and their Work', *Daily Life in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Britnell (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998), 58-61; Gundolf Keil, 'Hortus Sanitatis, Gart der Gesundheit, Gaerde der Sunthede', *Medieval Gardens: Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium on the History of Landscape Architecture (9th)*, ed. Elizabeth B. MacDougall (Washington, D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1986), 55-68.

9 See the essay by Kathryn Rudy, 'Relics in the Enclosed Gardens', in this volume, pp. 170-189.

10 Kateřina Horníčková, 'Memory, Politics and Holy Relics: Catholic Tactics amidst the Bohemian Reformation', *Filosoficky Casopis*, 59, 3 (2011), 133-142.

11 Five Enclosed Gardens in Mechelen have bone or stone relics, most of them with *cedulae*, written in Dutch in Gothic script in red or occasionally green ink. The relics of the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) are lost; the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2) has c. 18 relics; the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3) has 5 relics.

12 The *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2) has a large human relic bone (jaw) with teeth mounted on a red velvet textile purse (G2. Ref. BH2-RE-013-OM-OR). The C14 dating between 770 and 970 AD has a 95.4 probability. Stable isotopes (d15N and d13C) analyses give an indi-

cation of the diet of the person: a mix of vegetables (herbivore diet) and terrestrial nutrition (meat-carnivore diet). See: KIK-IRPA, Brussels, Matthieu Boudin, *Radio Carbon Dating Report Enclosed Gardens*, report 2702/2018 (unpublished).

13 The relic jar in Garden 2 certainly does not have the same visual impact as the thousands of bones and skulls found in 1106 in a mass grave and venerated in the Golden Chamber of the Basilica of St Ursula in Cologne, where the bones are mounted on the walls and the skulls in shrines. See: Scott B. Montgomery, *St Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins of Cologne: Relics, Reliquaries and the Visual Culture of Group Sanctity in Late Medieval Europe* (Bern: Lang, 2009).

14 The large rock crystal in the *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4) is mounted on red velvet. The oval-shaped crystal in the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) covers a miniature on parchment of the Virgin and Child.

15 Cynthia Jean Hahn, *Strange Beauty: Issues in the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries, 400-circa 1204* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012); *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, ed. Martina Bagnoli et al. (Cleveland/ Baltimore/London: Cleveland Museum of Art, Walters Art Museum, British Museum, 2010); Genevra Kornbluth, 'Active Optics: Carolingian Rock Crystal on Medieval Reliquaries,' *Different Visions. A Journal of New Perspectives on Medieval Art*, Issue 4, January 2014. <http://differentvisions.org/articles-pdf/four/kornbluth-active-optics.pdf>.

16 *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1). Ref. BH1-B-100-BR, flower with heart of rock crystal.

17 See: KIK-IRPA, Brussels, Ina Van den Berghe and Maaïke Vandorpe, *Laboratory analysis of the Textiles in the Enclosed Gardens*, report 2018 (unpublished).

18 The little pearls are strung together on wire. This wire forms the core of the silk-wrapped petals.

19 Only five Enclosed Gardens have pilgrim badges (G1, G2, G3, G4 and G6). See also the essay by Marjolijn Kruij in this volume. For the element identification of the metals of the badges with XRF analysis, see: Andrea Marchetti,

Patrick Storme, Karoline De Wael, *Characterisation of metallic elements from 5 different panels*, ArtGarden project, AXES, University of Antwerp, July 2018 (unpublished).

20 The cases of four Gardens were certainly originally covered with this decorated paper. In the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) and the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6) the original paper was removed at the beginning of the 20th century (remnants were found during the recent conservation). No other reference to this technique of decorating paper in the 15th century is known; it might be related to the techniques of gilt leather production, practised in Mechelen from the 16th century onwards. The components of the original paper are a support of thin paper covered with an ochre paint and tinfoil, and on top an organic layer (varnish). The tinfoil is very brittle and powdery and some of the original material has disappeared. The XRF analysis was done on a fragment found behind the altar of the Garden with the Unicorn (G1). See: KIK-IRPA, Brussels, Marina Van Bos and Maaïke Vandorpe, *Analyses of artefacts from the Enclosed Gardens*, report July 2018 (unpublished).

21 Degumming of silk is the process of removing the sericin, a sticky substance produced by the silkworm that holds the strands of silk together. Removing the gum improves the lustre, colour and texture of the silk. The silk filaments used for the flowers are long, thin and smooth. See: KIK-IRPA, Brussels, Ina Van den Berghe, *Textile analyses*, sample 12893/02 (Zeiss Imager, enlargement of 200×), report 2016.

22 Due to the degradation of the silk of two of the blue flowers, the black ink is clearly visible. The damage is too small to permit identification of the text.

23 Brownish coloured cardboard as an inner support for the silk flower could be observed only where the covering silk was damaged. G1. Ref. BH1-B-121-MR.

24 Lisa Monnas, *Merchants, Princes and Painters: Silk Fabrics in Italian and Northern Paintings 1300-1550* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 30.

25 Margaret of Austria's palace in Mechelen was richly decorated with walls covered in green taffeta and tapestries.

In her art collection were pieces of figurative embroidery. See: Dagmar Eichberger, 'Margaret of Austria's Treasures. An early Habsburg Collection in the Burgundian Netherlands,' *Inventories of Charles V and the Imperial Family*, ed. Farnando Checa Cremades, Vol III (Madrid, 2010) 2351-2363.

26 Karina Grömer, 'Recycling of Textiles in Historic Contexts in Europe: Case Studies from 1500 BC till 1500 AD,' *Recikliraj, ideje iz prošlosti* (2017), 76-77;

K. Stolleis, *Messgewänder aus deutschen Kirchenschätzen vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2001), 15; M. Clegg Hyer, 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle: Imagined and Reimagined Textiles in Anglo-Saxon England,' *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* 8, eds. R. Netherton and G. Owen-Crocker (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2012), 49-62.

27 C. Marichal, 'Mexican Cochineal and European Demand for a Luxury Dye, 1550-1850,' *Global Goods and the Spanish Empire, 1492-1824*, eds. B. Aram and B. Yun-Casalilla (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 197-215.

28 This is a technique of rolling paper, also known as filigree work or quilling. The sheet of light brown paper, made from extremely long and irregular plant fibres, measures c. 35 × 25 cm and has chain lines created by the paper makers' sieve. To make the *paperolles*, the paper was folded in two, rolled up and cut to the desired length. The paper looks like a firm packing material since its roughness and colour make it unsuitable for writing.

29 The Agnus Dei wax medallions were consecrated on the Wednesday of Easter week and distributed to pilgrims on the Saturday of the same week. After consecration, the pope would put the Agnus Dei in the reversed mitres of the bishops attending the ceremony in Rome. The bishops would distribute them to pilgrims. For Agnus Dei, see: Eugène Mangenot, 'Agnus Dei,' *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, eds. Alfred Vacant and Eugène Mangenot (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1923), 1: 605-613; eds. William Smith and Samuel Cheetham, *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Christian Antiquities* (New Delhi: Logos Press, 2005), 44; see also the contribution by Caroline Van Cauwenberghe in this volume.

30 F. W. Robins, *Story of the Lamp and*

the Candle (London: Oxford University Press, 1939).

31 Agnus Dei in precious holders of gold and silver were owned by noble families all over Europe from the 15th century onwards. See: Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, 'Lambs, Coral, Teeth, and the Intimate Intersection of Religion and Magic in Renaissance Tuscany,' *Images, Relics, and Devotional Practices in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, eds. Sally Cornelison and Scott Montgomery (Tempe: Arizona State University Press, 2005), 143-151; Cynthia Hahn with Beatriz Chadour-Sampson, *The thing of mine I have loved the best: Meaningful Jewels* (exhib. cat., Paris: Les Enluminures, 2018), cat. 2, no. 6, nr. 27; John Cherry, 'Healing Through Faith: The Continuation of Medieval Attitudes to Jewellery into the Renaissance,' *Renaissance Studies*, 15 (2001): 154-171; John Cherry, 'Containers for Agnus Dei,' *Through a Glass Brightly: Studies in Byzantine and Medieval Art and Archaeology Presented to David Buckton*, ed. C. Entwistle (Oxford: Oxbow, 2003), 171-84. For an early 15th-century example in the V&A Museum, see: Ronald Lightbown, *Medieval European Jewellery* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1992), cat. 45, 507.

32 For 'Paste de S.S. Martiri', see: Mangenot (1923), 612-613.

33 Agnus Dei in the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1). Ref. BH1-B-109-BR (diameter 1.7 cm).

34 The *Enclosed Garden with Virgin and Child* made in Mechelen c. 1500-1525, now in the Begijnhof Museum in Herentals, has several wax Agnus Dei with the names of Popes Clement X, Clement XII and Innocent XIII. See Balat: <http://balat.kikirpa.be/photo.php?path=X017521&objnr=47788&nr=6>

35 In 1513 Easter Sunday was on 6 April; this was the first time Leo X blessed the Agnus Dei. He was elected pope on 9 March 1513 and crowned on 19 March 1513 at the age of 37. The *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) has a second small Agnus Dei (diameter 6.7 cm) with the name of Pope Leo X on the reverse. Ref. BH1-B-061-BM.

36 Kathryn M. Rudy, *Postcards on Parchment: The Social Lives of Medieval Books* (London: New Haven, 2015), 235-236. There are two roundels with the Agnus Dei painted on parchment in the

Enclosed Garden of Geel (St Dymphna Church) and in the Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child of Herentals (Begijnhof Museum), both produced in Mechelen, c. 1500-1525.

37 Lois Sherr Dubin, *The History of Beads: From 100,000 BC to the Present* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2009).

38 *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1): crystal glass beads are found on the three ends of the cross.

39 The rosary developed in the late 15th/early 16th century. Prayer beads (also called paternosters) have a much longer history.

40 For the guild of bead-makers (*perelgaters*), see: Pieter Marius Nicolaas Jan Génard, 'Aanteekening over de Antwerpsche gilden en ambachten,' *Verslagen en mededelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Taal- en Letterkunde* (1895), 286 http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_ver025189501_01/_ver025189501_01_0010.php.

41 Thomas Alexander Spitzers, 'Late Medieval Bone Bead Production: Socio-economic Aspects based on Material from Constance, Germany,' *Anthropozoologica*, 26 (1997); Maria G. Sandor, 'Zur mittelalterlichen Herstellungstechnik der Knochenknöpfe und -perlen,' *Folia Archaeologica*, 13 (1961), 148.

42 Yellow amber was imported from the area of Königsberg. For the production of prayer beads in yellow amber in Bruges in the 15th century, see: J. A. Van Houtte, 'Ambernijverheid en Paternostermakers te Brugge gedurende de XIVe en XVe eeuw,' *Handelingen van het genootschap 'Société d'émulation' te Brugge*, 82 (1939), 149-181; <https://ojs.ugent.be/gvg/article/viewFile/4082/4076>.

43 Coral, the most precious of all beads, came from Torre del Greco near Naples, where the sea corals were harvested in great quantities.

44 The Christ Child figures are mounted on a metal thread for attaching to the peat base or wooden case. See the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt on the Unicorn* (G1). Ref. BH1-P-015-ML.

45 Adriaan van den Dorpel, *Middel-eeuwse pijpen en terracotta heiligenbeeldjes in Zeeland. Een analyse van de middeleeuwse religieuze beleving in Zeeland in functie van heiligenbeeldjes*, unpublished MA thesis (Ugent, 2013).

III. 52

Peat base wrapped in
linen and green silk at
the front of the Garden
with a Calvary



III. 53

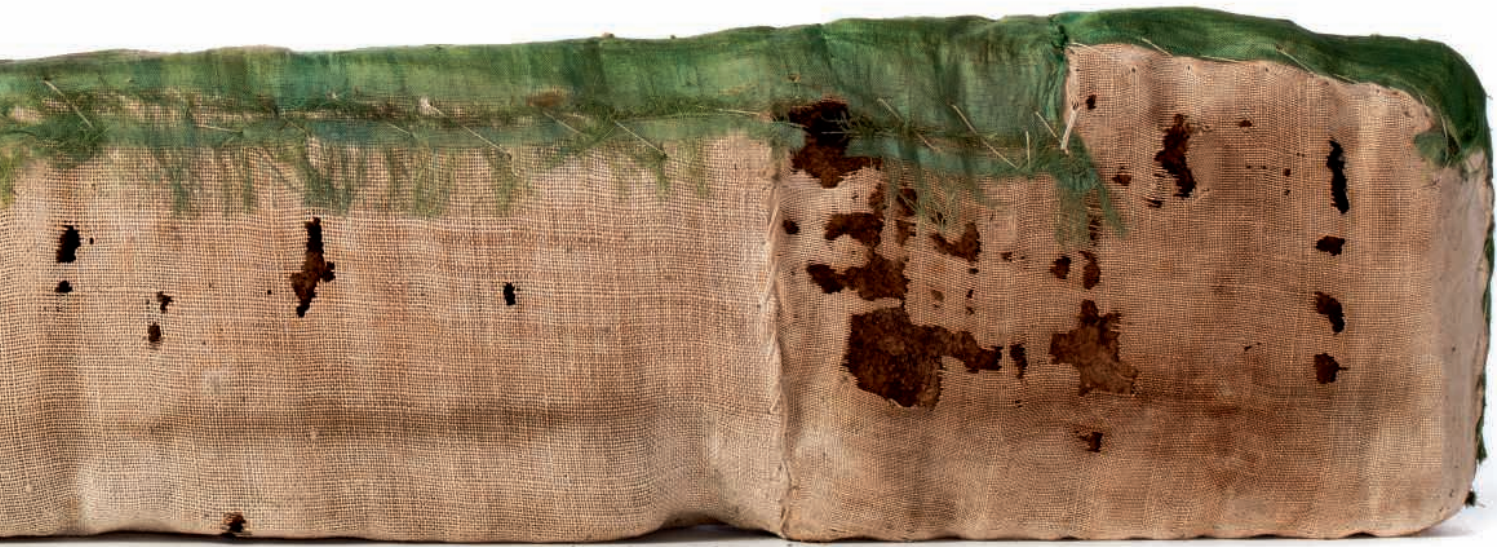
The underside of
the peat base of the
Garden with a Calvary



III. 54

The back of the peat
base of the Garden
with a Calvary





See: http://lib.ugent.be/fulltxt/RUG01/002/060/016/RUG01002060016_2013_0001_AC.pdf.

46 KIK-IRPA, Brussels, Marina Van Bos and Maaïke Vandorpe, *Material technical analysis of different 'parts' in the Enclosed Gardens in context of the ArtGarden Project*, report 2018 (unpublished).

47 Thanks to Lorne Campbell for this reference to the Tournai archives. See also: J. Haemers, 'Geletterd verzet. Diplomatiek, politiek en herinneringscultuur van opstandelingen in de laatmiddeleeuwse en vroegmoderne stad (casus: Brugge en Gent)', *Bulletin de la Commission Royale d'Histoire*, clxxvi, (2010), 3-4.

48 Several similar images created from papier-mâché or *papier-pressé* were recovered, depicting Christ as the Man of Sorrows, Christ surrounded by the Arma Christi, Christ emerging from the tomb, Christ in profile. See: Horst Appuhn, *Chronik des Klosters Wienhausen* (Celle: Schweiger & Pick, 1956); Horst Appuhn and Christian von Heusinger, *Der Fund kleiner Andachtsbilder des 13. bis 17. Jahrhunderts in Kloster Wienhausen* (Cologne: Seemann, 1961); Horst Appuhn, *Kloster Wienhausen. 4: Der Fund vom Nonnenchor* (Wienhausen: Kloster Wienhausen, 1973), <https://monasticmatrix.osu.edu/bibliographia/kloster-wienhausen-der-fund-vom-nonnenchor>.

49 Most probably the moulds for these frames were made by the alabaster-cutters or *cleynstekers* themselves. No detailed research on Mechelen production is available for this craft.

50 On the first medallion Christ is depicted in profile; on the right medallion the Christ Child is holding the attributes of the Passion. See: Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: The Image in Late Medieval Monastic Devotions* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 366-367 and the essay by Hannah Iterbeke in this volume, pp. 214-215. The much smaller baby Christ – to the left of the cross – has a nimbus and is wrapped in gauze. The pipe-clay figure has remains of polychromy and is mounted on red velvet with embroidery in silver thread in the shape of a cross.

51 Tony Oost, 'Voorwerpen in pijpen en beeldmatrijzen: religieuze massaproductie', *Stad in Vlaanderen, cultuur en maatschappij 1477-1787*, ed. Jan Van der

Stock (Brussel, 1991), 448-450.

52 For the archaeological excavation in the 'Oud Begijnhof' outside the walls in 1982, see: G. Van Bulck, 'Een gaaf pijpenpaarden Katrientje', *Tijdschrift Mechelse Vereniging voor Archeologie*, 2, 1984, 45-49. For the discovery of a mould in the excavations at the Bethanië convent, Schoutstraat: see: P. Raffo, J. Vanbeemen and S. De Cock, 'Beschouwingen bij onze opgravingen in het voormalige Bethanieklooster', *Tijdschrift Mechelse Vereniging voor Archeologie*, 1, 1979, 3-14.

53 *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1), diameter 82.06 mm, thickness 2.02 mm. Ref. BH1-A-014-BM.

54 (G1). Ref. BH1-A-014-BM.

55 (G4). Ref. BH4-I-001-BL to BH4-I-009-BL.

56 Paternoster Pendant with the Virgin and Child and the Meeting of Joachim and Anna at the Golden Gate (reverse), c. 1440-50; Flemish or Burgundian, sardonyx, enamelled gold, silver, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975, 1975.1.1522.

57 Johan Dambruyne, 'Verzamelinventaris van de nog niet geherinventariseerde archieven van de Mechelse ambachten (tweede helft 13de eeuw-einde 18de eeuw)', *Studia et documenta mechliniensia, deel IX*, edited by Koninklijke Kring voor Oudheidkunde, Letteren en Kunst van Mechelen, 2006.

ILL. 55

Flower with a coral bead at its centre and various silk-wrapped bone beads – Garden with a Crucified Christ



Dad was

Dad's



ILL. 56
Flower made of parchment, silk, metal wire and with small pearls at the extremities – Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den



III. 57
Decorative paper,
red ochre, tinfoil and
varnish – Garden with
a Calvary



III. 58
Paperolle in rich silk
fabric with a damask
pattern – Garden with
St Ursula

III. 59 (pages 112–113)
Detail of branches with
flowers, yellow and
green silk, parchment
and metallic gut
thread – Garden with
a Crucified Christ







A Small Print of St Anthony

HANNAH ITERBEKE

III. 60

Woodcut of the
Temptation of
St Anthony – Garden
with Daniel in the
Lions' Den

In the *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4), between the prophet and the alabaster sculpture of St Jerome, a tiny woodcut of the Temptation of St Anthony can be distinguished. The bearded saint holds a rosary and is tormented by two devilish monsters who are pounding the anchorite with sticks. Traces of green (grass) and yellow (hallow) ink reveal the image was once (partially) coloured. The temptation scene is surrounded by a narrow ornamental Gothic frame, which is reminiscent of illuminations in late medieval manuscripts. Therefore, it seems likely that this print was made for the purpose of being pasted into a manuscript or a book. Another copy of the anonymous print was found in an edition of the *Missale Trajectense* (Missal of Utrecht) published in 1540 by Hendrik Peter van Middelburg (Henricus Petri Middelburgensis) in Antwerp. Earlier editions of the Missal (1495; 1514) do not include this particular illustration of St Anthony.

Most early printmakers did not sign small devotional prints, so to say something meaningful about them, it is better to look at the context in which they functioned. Such a small woodcut was often classified as a *kleines Andachtsbild*. This German term refers to the contemplative function of the image. Previous scholars attributed this meditative purpose to prints mainly on the grounds of their iconography, but the original context in which they functioned was given less attention. In their own age, however, small devotional prints were not only stuck into manuscripts or books, but even eaten during holy feasts. Today most of them are no longer in their original context of use and are kept in print rooms in various institutions.

However, in this specific case, the context of the woodcut is a mixed-media shrine, transforming the print from a book illustration to a sacred object. The print is framed by intertwined silver thread, subsequently attached to a piece of cotton and red velvet on which three small relics are attached. The composition is surrounded by an inscription in old Dutch that probably relates not to St Anthony, but to the sacred remains. Although only parts of the writing can be read, it seems to state the following: 'This is from the tree where Abraham offered his son' (*va(n)den boem daer abraha(m) syne(n) zoe(n) ae(n) offerde*). This is in reference to the sacred tree of Moreh at Shechem where Abraham built his first altar after submitting to God's will by offering his only son Isaac. At the bottom, the inscription reads 'Of the golden gate' (*va(n) die gulde porte*) in reference to the eastern gate of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The saintly packages to which the texts refer probably hold dirt, stones or wood that functioned as 'earth' or 'contact relics'. The whole composition is placed within a wooden or cardboard frame covered by a thin glass plate. It seems plausible that the ensemble functioned as a medallion on its own before it was added to the Enclosed Garden.

From book illustration to relic medallion inserted into a mixed-media shrine, this small woodcut reveals the versatile ways in which prints were used in the early modern period.

ILL. 61
St John the Evangelist
– Garden with
a Calvary



ILL. 61

ILL. 62
The Virgin Mary –
Garden with
a Calvary



ILL. 62

ILL. 63

Agnus Dei on a brass disc with metallic gut thread and black beads
– Garden with Daniel
in the Lions' Den



ILL. 63



Agnus Dei

CAROLINE

VAN CAUWENBERGE

III. 64

Wax Agnus Dei medallion mounted on a parchment disc covered with silk fabric, embroidered with spiralled silver thread and a variety of glass beads – Garden with St Ursula

Among other devotional objects, a wax Agnus Dei seal is integrated into the overwhelming *horror vacui* fauna and flora of the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2). Agnus Dei are wax medallions stamped with the image of Jesus as the Lamb of the Apocalypse. In this Enclosed Garden, however, the other side of the disc, depicting Christ's Resurrection, is displayed. The inscription that goes around the central image, *Data est mihi omnis potestas* (Matthew 28:18), is taken from a passage of Matthew's gospel describing this moment. The presence of the image is iconographically meaningful in the Garden and complements the *noli me tangere* scene, another key moment in the Resurrection story of Christ, represented in the heavenly garden by two smaller wooden figures.

Apart from the important connection with the iconography within the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2), the Agnus Dei was probably also included for its symbolic and sacramental values. First, since their origin in the fourth century, Agnus Dei have been honoured for their talismanic properties. The wax used to make the discs was taken from the Paschal candle of St Peter's Basilica in Rome. The devotion paid to Agnus Dei stems from the idea that remnants of this Easter candle could serve as protective talismans.

Moreover, thanks to their papal benediction, Agnus Dei are also Catholic sacramentals. During the consecration ceremony the Agnus Dei are blessed by means of a 'baptism': the medallions are immersed in holy water mixed with oil and chrism. The consecration date of the Agnus Dei in this particular Enclosed Garden – 1513 – is depicted beneath the main image and provides a *terminus post quem* for the Garden.

In addition to their intrinsic value, the Agnus Dei drew power from the personal intervention of the Pope during their production and, as a result of their papal benediction, Agnus Dei became popular and treasured objects of private devotion. As sacramentals, Agnus Dei were used for a diverse range of temporary and individual necessities. People would wear them as protection against sudden death or to secure victory on the battlefield. They were also used as insurance against lightning and thunder and were thrown into fires in order to extinguish them. The rising demand for the wax discs, especially in the fifteenth century, made them the ultimate commodity and in the second half of that century the first papal bulls prohibiting the commerce in Agnus Dei were issued.

The prominent position of the medallion at the upper centre of the garden in the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2) indicates the importance of its presence. In this Garden, a medallion inscribed with the words *In den beginne was het Woord* (John 1:1) is also included. The beginning of the Gospel of John was known for its special energy in warding off evil. The thaumaturgical values attributed to the Agnus Dei, the beginning of John's gospel and the many relics in the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2) must be understood in the context of the Augustine sisters in Mechelen, who worked as nurses in their own hospital.

ILL. 65

Christ on the Cross –
Garden with
a Crucified Christ



ILL. 66
Christ on the Cross –
Garden with a Calvary



The Painted Wings of the Mechelen Enclosed Gardens

ANDREA PEARSON

ILL. 67
Garden with a Calvary
with closed shutters

The rich topographies of the Mechelen Enclosed Gardens deeply compel the eye and the mind, such that the cabinets have eclipsed their painted wings. Yet, as this essay reveals, the imagery of the panels was crucial to shaping meaning in and through the works at their origins. The wings, in fact, deeply complicate the pious content of the triptychs, especially in regard to portraits of supplicants that appear in some examples. These features, in addition, provide a window into the neglected social implications of the Gardens, which in turn invite revision to some past assertions about gender, audiences and production. I offer a series of observations along these lines using six winged Gardens from the Augustinian community of Onze-Lieve-Vrouwegasthuis (Hospital of Our Lady) in Mechelen.¹ Integrating the shutters interpretively with the gardens significantly revises modern understandings of these alluringly complex works.

Portraits in the wings of four Mechelen Gardens point to significant variances in meaning among the triptychs. In the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3), made between c. 1525 and 1528, with wings painted by the Master of the Guild of St George (Ill. 67), inscriptions identify two of the portrayed figures as hospital sisters. One is represented on the right-hand inner shutter and the other is on its reverse.² They are identified by inscriptions as Cornelia Andries and Jozijne Van Coolene, the 'first mother' and 'first sister' of a programme of reform initiated at the hospital in 1509.³ They kneel in prayer in sparse landscapes with their respective patron saints, St Cornelius and St Joost. Portrayed on the inner and outer left wing are Peeter Van Steenwinckele and Marten Avonts, Augustinian canons of Notre-Dame d'Hanswijk in Mechelen and

sequential financial stewards (*rentmeesters*) of the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwegasthuis during the reforms. They appear with their patron saints, St Peter and St Martin of Tours (see Ill. 67, p. 123).

It is probable that the Garden was ordered by Cornelia Andries to commemorate successful reform: she, along with Peeter Van Steenwinckele, who had died by this time, were its chief compatriots.⁴ Among the reform-related practices the Garden advocates is spiritual pilgrimage, about which the sisters' spiritual advisor Jan Pascha wrote.⁵ It seems likely that the Crucifixion-themed garden of the work helped to focus the sisters' piety around this key spiritual trend. Furthermore, when read together with the garden, the portraits of Cornelia Andries and Jozijne Van Coolene suggest that these sisters practised archetypal monastic enclosure, in this case modified to allow the sisters access to the ill. The gated fences of the Enclosed Gardens define the gardens thusly, as the *hortus conclusus* or 'enclosed garden' of the biblical Song of Songs that became emblematic of the Virgin Mary's purity.⁶ The Garden's message of commemoration and compliance was relevant to the hospital's internal and external leadership. In particular, the Bishop of Cambrai had assigned visitations to the hospital to Nicholas Roberti, prior of the Windesheim Augustinian canons regular of Zevenborren near Brussels. Roberti was to make his assessments together with the prior of the Augustinian canons regular at Groenendaal monastery, also of the Windesheim Congregation. The Garden implied to all of its likely audiences that the hospital's administrators had successfully cultivated an ideal, socio-spiritually reformed community that would continue to thrive.



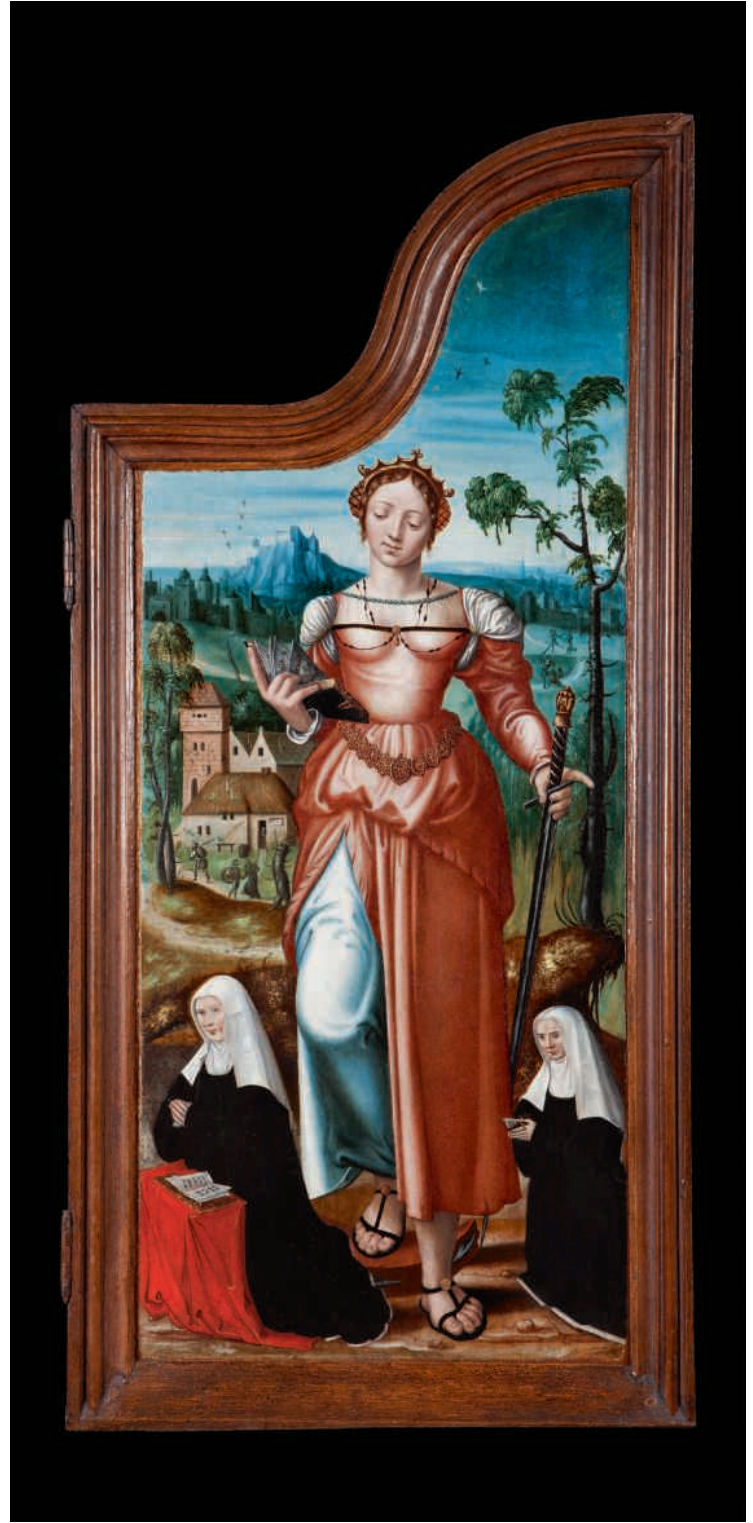
hier maeten aughts prekeren vander Refo-
mation die tweede Pintmeester



Zulke sozique van Coolen vander
Reformatien die eerste zulten



ILL. 68
Right-hand wing of the
Garden with St Ursula



ILL. 69
Right-hand wing of the
Garden with St Anne

Another Garden from the hospital, the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2) (Ill. 68), probably made between 1513 and 1524, attends to the socio-spiritual concerns of a family who resided in Mechelen in the early sixteenth century.⁷ Archival and visual evidence has revealed that the three kneeling figures in the wings are a nun who was professed at the Hospital of Our Lady and her parents, not a priest and two nuns as previously proposed. The individuals are Jacob Van den Putte on the left and, on the right, Margaretha Svos and Maria Van den Putte, Jacob and Margaretha's daughter. Jacob and Margaretha's patron saints, James the Greater and Margaret of Antioch, stand behind them. In a highly unusual approach for portraits in this period, Maria is shown with her eyes closed (Ill. 70). Recent infrared reflectographic (IRR) studies of the panel revealed that she was depicted with open eyes in the painting's underdrawing, thereby demonstrating that her representation with shut eyes was deliberate (see Ill. 160, p. 251).⁸ This approach to Maria's visage was likely meant to convey that she was blind, or at the very least visually impaired. Indeed, closed eyes were a pictorial convention for blindness in art of this period. In answer to a widely held view that sight was the privileged means of effective devotion, the Garden prioritised variety in sensory experience in spirituality: touch is invoked by the sculptural garden, smell by its blossoms – were the flowers scented with fragrant oils? – taste by its fruit, and hearing by St Margaret's parted lips that invoke speech or song. The Enclosed Garden, with its emblematic association with purity, also helps to counter a specific, enduring negative association with blindness and the blind: sexual misbehaviour. Thus, the work claims meritorious piety and virtue for Maria despite the impairment considered to threaten it. It did so for her parents too, her compatriots in the painted wings. Indeed, all three were rendered spiritually suspect by Maria's non-normative body, for disabled children were considered to be God's punishment for parents who had sinned.

Two professed nuns in the right-hand wing of another Garden from Hospital of Our Lady, the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6) (Ill. 69), offer the opportunity to reconsider place of origin. The sisters, diminutive in scale compared to other figures in the wings, face the garden in prayer. At the centre is a sculpture repre-



sented *Sint-Anna-te-drieën* or 'St Anne in threes', in which three generations of the Holy Family, represented by St Anne, the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child, are portrayed together in a visual assertion of ancestry. The sisters in the shutter are accompanied by St Catherine of Alexandria, who strides over the broken wheel that signified her torture and holds the sword of her martyrdom. In the left-hand wing a penitent St Jerome, shown with his attributes of a lion and cardinal's hat, beats his chest with a rock while in reverence to a crucifix. Although there is evidence that the depicted nuns were not professed at the hospital (as discussed below), two aspects of the garden's imagery can be related generally to a monastic hospital context. To either side of *Sint-Anna-te-drieën* are St Augustine, representing the monastic order to which the Hospital of Our Lady belonged, and St Elisabeth of

ILL. 70

The nun with the closed eyes on the right-hand wing of the *Garden with St Ursula*



Hungary, who was known for her charity toward the infirm. If the Garden was ordered by or for individuals associated with the Hospital of Our Lady, then it is possible that the two sisters in the wing are Catharien Van den Putte and Catelyn Van den Putte, both of whom professed at the hospital in 1529, and that the Garden was completed around that time (it is unclear at present if they were related to Jacob Van den Putte).⁹ The choice of St Catherine makes sense as a namesake saint for the two women, and St Catherine appears between and gesturing towards both. The possibility of this identification is not precluded by the addition of the two figures over the original paint layers of the wings, as revealed in recent technological studies of the panels: the development of the imagery and the cabinet's content to the specifications of the sisters remains an option.

As with the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3) discussed above, the portraits on the wing of the *Sint-Anna-te-drieën Garden* (G6) claim for the depicted nuns the virtue of purity, as advanced by the fenced garden to which they pay reverence. In this case, however, this ideal is amplified by other iconographical elements in the cabinet. At the upper centre is the Virgin Mary as the Virgin of the Sun and the Moon of Revelation 12:1 (Ill. 71), which describes 'a woman clothed in the sun, and a moon beneath her feet, crowned with twelve stars.' This theme had come to signify the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, in which Mary was believed to have been pure of flesh since birth, a condition considered requisite to her production of the Infant's sacramental flesh. Immediately below is a pipe-clay medallion illustrating a *hortus conclusus*, echoing the emblematic meaning of the cabinet's gated fence and botanical topography. Furthermore, the two saints on the wings were also known for their purity, as conveyed in Jacobus de Voragine's deeply influential *Legenda aurea* (The Golden Legend) of c. 1260. St Catherine of Alexander was 'admirable in her chastity, which she perceived even amidst conditions that ordinarily put chastity at risk.'¹⁰ Voragine describes that Jerome wrote: 'I felt myself surrounded by clusters of pretty girls, and the fires of lust were lighted in my frozen body and moribund flesh. [...] I did not stop beating my breast until the Lord restored my peace of mind.'¹¹ The iconography of the panel conveys Jerome's fortitude in the face of bodily

temptation and makes a claim for the sisters' purity by association.

Newly revealed visual evidence about the portraits in the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6) suggests that the depicted sisters may not have professed at the Hospital of Our Lady, as previously believed. The cleaning of the painted surface undertaken in 2016 made it clear that the sisters' habits are rendered in deep black, which is quite distinct from the brown habits portrayed in the Gardens discussed above that undoubtedly do depict sisters from the Mechelen hospital. The black habits of the nuns in Garden 6 may very well have aligned them, and by extension the work at its inception, with a different community of nuns altogether. If this were the case, then the circumstances of Garden 6's arrival at the hospital may eventually be determined by archival research or other means. In the meantime, several scenarios come to mind.

One prospect, albeit remote, is that the triptych was gifted to the hospital by the two unidentified nuns depicted in the shutter. A more likely scenario is that the work was transferred to the hospital later in its history. Such action could have been prompted by a family connection or by an affiliation with another convent that was subject to strife or closure. In terms of the latter, two convents of Augustinians in Mechelen where the nuns wore black habits are possibilities, in both cases houses of canonesses regular founded in the fifteenth century: Mount Thabor (Sint-Salvator) and Bethanië (Maria). Mount Thabor burned in 1572 during the Eighty Years' War. The community formally disbanded in 1578; however, it was reconstituted in Mechelen only seven years later, in 1585. The reconstitution of Thabor makes the period of strife leading up to it an improbable time for a permanent transfer of the Garden to the Hospital of Our Lady: if the objective was to preserve the work in anticipation of violence, then it probably would have been returned to Thabor after the situation stabilized. At Bethanië, which had been incorporated into the Windesheim Congregation between 1424 and 1430, nuns were active consumers of devotional images, as attested by woodcuts made for the community around 1500.¹² These circumstances suggest that the community was also interested in other kinds of imagery and, by extension, in commissioning and/or having an Enclosed Garden.

ILL. 71

The Virgin of the Sun and the Moon of Revelation – Garden with St Anne

Bethanië was permanently dissolved in 1783, which seems a probable time for a Garden to have been transferred. Certainly, additional scenarios could be suggested as well, such as the transmission of the work from a monastic house outside the city, perhaps an Augustinian convent that administered to the infirm given the sculptures of Sts Augustine and Elisabeth of Hungary in the garden.

Along with the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2), which includes portraits of Jacob Van den Putte and Margaretha Svos, another example from the Hospital of Our Lady, the *Enclosed Garden with a Madonna* (G7) (see Ill. 23, p. 47), demonstrates that the Mechelen Gardens resonated not only with religious women, the focus of most scholarship on these and other Gardens, but also with the laity. Challenging for this example in particular is that the original content of the cabinet was replaced, probably in the eighteenth century; it currently features a sculptural Virgin and Child surrounded by flowering vines and relics.¹⁵ The imagery of the wings is nonetheless telling, in part because a male figure in lay garb is represented on the right. He turns in prayer toward the cabinet while locking eyes with the viewer. A coat-of-arms on the prie-dieu at which he kneels is a tantalizing if thus far unresolved clue to his identity.¹⁴ The date of 1539 appears there too, evidencing that the wings were painted in that year. The left-hand shutter, in contrast to the right, is not devoted to portraiture but, rather, to an image of the Virgin Mary who supports the dead body of Christ in a rendering of the Pietà. In considering possibilities for the iconography of the cabinet's original content, the Pietà suggests a Crucifixion-related motif along the lines of the reform-related Garden 3 discussed above. This reading is supported by a passage in the open book before the votary, derived ultimately from Psalm 120:2, the focus of which is redemption: 'The Lord is my salvation (*Auxilium meum in domino*).'¹⁵ Alternatively, akin with the current arrangement, the subject may have been Mary and the Christ Child, since pairing Incarnational and Passion-related iconographies foretold the sacrifice of Christ on behalf of the salvation of humanity.¹⁵ If this were the case, then the original content of the cabinet may have inspired the current theme, which would suggest close attention to the prototype.

Along with the two Gardens discussed above, the portrait in the example with the Piéta demon-

strates that not only women but also men were audiences and owners of such works. Archival research offers another means for unearthing such evidence and for hypothesizing meaning for these individuals in some cases. An extract from a 1455 testament drawn up for Phillip d'Escamaing of Tournai describes an Enclosed Garden at an early date: 'Item, I bequeath Lady d'Escamaing, Robert's wife, a garden adorned with silk flowers, in which is found a representation of Christ.'¹⁶ It is not unlikely that the Garden in Phillip's possession came to be his through an inheritance of his own, in which case the work may have been personally as well as devotionally meaningful. In another case, two male donors, Petrus Dominicus and Theodoor Kuyt, presented an Enclosed Garden to the St Dymphna church in Geel; perhaps they were its patrons, as with Jacob Van den Putte and his wife Margaretha Svos.¹⁷ Certainly, the display of such works in public churches meant that laymen were their frequent viewers. So too did professed men see and appear in them, with the canons depicted in the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary* (G3) and the visitations assigned to the community during the reform period. Deeper allowances must therefore be made for men as patrons and viewers of Enclosed Gardens.¹⁸

Imagery in the wings of three other Enclosed Gardens from the hospital aligns with expectations for devotional works of the period, even as it sometimes departs from them. In a traditional approach, holy figures are emphasised in the shutters. St Peter and St John the Evangelist appear on the interior panels of a Garden (G4) that features in its garden the prophet Daniel in the den of lions (Daniel 6:6-24) (see Ill. 17, p. 35). To the left is *Sint-Anna-te-drieën*. St Jerome appears to the right, with the lion from whose paw he extracted a thorn, as described in Voragine's *Legenda aurea*. The figures in the wings are identifiable by their attributes: Peter holds the keys to the kingdom of heaven presented to him by Jesus (Matthew 16:19) and John holds a chalice from which emerges a snake, a reference to John's miraculous survival after drinking poison (described by Voragine). In another Garden – *Enclosed Garden with a Crucified Christ* (G5) – the left wing presents the Virgin Mary holding the Christ Child. St Anthony Abbot appears on the right, with his attribute, a pig, representing the lard that was used to ease the painful skin affliction called St Anthony's fire that Antonite

monks were considered specialists in treating. Assuming the contents of the gardens in these two Enclosed Gardens are original, the holy figures chosen for depiction on the panels are unusual in relation to the corresponding gardens. Sts Peter and John the Evangelist have no clear thematic relationship to the figures of Anne, Daniel and Jerome, which together also defy explanation as a thematically unified group; Mary with the Christ Child is not often paired with St Anthony, albeit Mary without the infant Jesus certainly appears frequently in crucifixion scenes. These unusual approaches may have arisen from specific circumstances, such as cross-workshop practices in which the iconography of the wings was not developed in direct correspondence with the gardens they adorn. Enclosed Gardens made in this way may have been intended for the open market, as opposed to others discussed above that were personalised with portraits and made in response to specific circumstances. Alternatively, as with those Gardens, the pairings in these works may have originated with patrons who had specific reasons for selecting the imagery. For example, a married couple with the first names of Mary and Anthony may have influenced the choice of imagery for the *Enclosed Garden with a Crucified Christ* (G5) – much like Jacob Van de Putte is depicted with St James and Margaretha Svos with St Margaret in the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary* (G3) they commissioned.

The possibility of open-market production for these two Mechelen Gardens, and the ostensible patronage and gifting of the Van den Putte/Svos example to the Hospital of Our Lady by a lay married couple, calls for a revision to current thinking. In the standard approach to explaining the manufacture of the Mechelen Gardens, the gardens' handiwork is attributed to sisters of the hospital. This is no longer a tenable hypothesis, for they would not have contributed to making a highly customised, family-themed Garden that was in all likelihood a commissioned gift to the hospital. This patronage-focused approach to thinking about production is bolstered by new archival evidence and material research that point to the professional manufacture of the topographies.¹⁹ Perhaps, though, Jacob and Margaretha commissioned nuns in other convents in the city or its environs to produce the handiwork and perhaps assemble it with other elements in the cabinet. Indeed, nuns at Galilee in Ghent produced

a garden for an Enclosed Garden belonging to Margaret of Austria, regent of the Netherlands, in 1521.²⁰ This revision to current perceptions about manufacture calls in turn for grounding the hospital sisters' agency not in the making but rather in the reception of Enclosed Gardens.

An approach to the study of the Mechelen Gardens that integrates the wings interpretively with the gardens fundamentally changes modern understandings of the works. Portraits in two examples specify that they were commissioned by or belonged to lay individuals. This situation, especially in light of the commissioned example, strongly suggests that the handiwork in the cabinets was not produced by the hospital sisters as previously believed. Neither does it appear that the sisters assembled the sculptural elements in the cabinets to create the gardens (although perhaps they were the ones who later remade the garden of the *Enclosed Garden with a Madonna* (G7), if the Garden was in their possession at that time). Furthermore, the imagery of the panels implicates men as potential patrons and viewers of Gardens, thereby revising previous conclusions that gendered the works strictly around women and their spiritual practices. The portraits also speak to the social implications of Enclosed Gardens by associating for their viewers the depicted individuals with the values conveyed by the imagery. The Mechelen Gardens were thus far more varied in fundamental categories of identity than once thought, including in the areas of monastic profession and affiliation, familial status and gender. Far from a unified group, the triptychs speak to richly varied approaches to art making, patronage and image reception in the early modern Low Countries.

ILL. 72
Left-hand wing of the
Garden with St Ursula



1 A seventh Garden from the Hospital of Our Lady, the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1), once had wings, as attested by recesses in the wooden cabinet that accommodated hinges.

Perhaps this Garden came into the community later, such that imagery on the shutters did not pertain to the community. It is also possible that the wings were removed to enable installation in an architectural space that otherwise would have been too small to accommodate it.

2 The arguments presented here are summarised from Andrea Pearson, 'Monastic Utopianism in a Mechelen Besloten Hofje,' in *Imaging Utopia: New Perspectives on Northern Renaissance Art* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, forthcoming). For the attribution of the paintings, see the literature review in Catheline Périer-D'eteren, 'Un Tableau inédit du Maître de la Gilde de St Georges,' *Annales d'Histoire de l'Art et d'Archéologie* 32 (2010): 7-25. The *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3) is the only Mechelen Garden with figural imagery on the exterior wings; those of the *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4), discussed below, are adorned with golden flowers. The wings of the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3) are the only panels of the six Mechelen Gardens that have been attributed.

3 The reform statutes are preserved at the Archief van het Aartsbisdom Mechelen-Brussel in Mechelen [AAM], Gasthuizusters Mechelen 1, Statuten en ordonnanties, 1509. This version is a 16th-century copy of the original act, sealed by Jacob de Croÿ, Bishop of Cambrai, now preserved at the Stadsarchief Mechelen [SAM] (no catalogue number).

4 This Garden contains far fewer relics than the example discussed immediately below, which was commissioned by elite lay patrons with resources at their disposal.

5 Jan Pascha, *Deuote maniere om gheestelyck pelgrimage te trecken tot den heylighen lande*, printed later, in Dutch, French and English, between 1563 and 1630, as described by Albert Ampe, 'Nieuwe belichting van de persoon en het werk van Jan Pascha,' *Handelingen der Koninklijke Zuidnederlandse Maatschappij voor Taal- en Letterkunde en Geschiedenis* 18 (1964): 5-107, esp. 54.

6 'A garden enclosed, sister my bride / a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed (*Hortus conclusus soror mea sponsa / hortus conclusus fons signatus*)' (*Canticum Canticorum* 4:12).

7 These arguments are presented in greater depth in Andrea Pearson, 'Sensory Piety as Social Intervention in a Mechelen *Besloten Hofje*,' *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 9:2 (Summer 2017): DOI 10.5092/jhna.2017.9.2.1.

8 The IRR study was unveiled at a special exhibition of the Mechelen Gardens at the Museum Hof van Busleyden on January 11, 2017. My thanks to Lieve Watteeuw for discussing the results with me.

9 *Naemlyst der Zusters van O.-L.-V. Gasthuis, der Zusters van O.-L.-V. Gasthuis, sedert hare Stichting, binnen Mechelen* (Mechelen: H. Dierickx-Beke, 1862), 5-6.

10 Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 2:172.

11 Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 2:213.

12 A chronicle of Bethanië ordered by Prioress Liesbeth van Bergen in 1486, which continues to c. 1580, is now at SAM, EE XXIX/1. See the discussion by Wybren Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries: The Modern Devotion, the Canonesses of Windesheim, and their Writings*, trans. David F. Johnson (Woodbridge, England: The Boydell Press, 2004), 159-170. Examples of woodcuts from Bethanië are cited in Ursula Weekes, 'Convents as Patrons and Producers of Woodcuts in the Low Countries around 1500,' in *The Woodcut in Fifteenth Century Europe*, ed. Peter Parshall (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art; New Haven, : Yale University Press, 2009), 258-75.

13 Paul Vandenbroeck, ed., *Hooglied: De beeldwereld van religieuze vrouwen in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden, vanaf de 13de eeuw*, exhib. cat. (Brussels-Ghent: Paleis voor Schone Kunsten/Snoeck-Ducaju, 1994), caption for Ill. 193, p. 199. See also the catalogue entry by Hannah Iterbeke in this publication.

14 I have examined illustrations of heraldry in the following archival materials pertaining to Mechelen but did not find this particular crest: SAM, Verzameling Varia 134, 263, 311, 474/2, 553 and 668. My thanks to Dieter Viaene for directing me to these sources.

15 Alfred Acres, *Renaissance Invention and the Haunted Infancy* (London: Harvey Miller, 2013).

16 'Item, je donne à demiselle d'esca-maing, femme à Robert, ung gardinet ordonne de fleurs de soye, auquel est la pourtraiture de Nostre Seigneur.' Barbara Baert with the collaboration of Hannah Iterbeke, 'Revisiting the Enclosed Gardens of the Low Countries (Fifteenth Century Onwards). Gender, Textile, and the Intimate Space as Horticulture,' *TEXTILE* (2016): DOI 10.1080/14759756.2016.1167374, citing the Société historique et archéologique de Tournai (1897): 271, 334.

17 My thanks to Chantal Vandeplass of the Gasthuismuseum St Dimpna in Geel for this information.

18 Men are depicted with Enclosed Gardens in a number of devotional portraits to advocate their abilities at sexual control. See Andrea Pearson, *Envisioning Gender in Burgundian Devotional Art (1350-1530): Experience, Authority, Resistance* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2005), 90-135.

19 See the essays by Hannah Iterbeke and Frieda Sorber in the current volume.

20 Discussed by Dagmar Eichberger, *Leben mit Kunst, Wirken durch Kunst: Sammelwesen und Hofkunst unter Margarete von Österreich, Regentin der Niederlande* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), with documentation on 398, n. 121.



Concealed Applied Brocade

INGRID GEELEN

ANNE-SOPHIE AUGUSTYNIAK

ILL. 73

Detail from a piece of applied brocade in imitation of red velvet brocade with stylised pomegranate motifs – Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den

Applied brocade refers to a relief decoration that tangibly imitates silk textiles enriched with gold thread, which appeared frequently in the visual arts of the late Gothic period.¹ It was generally produced by pressing a sheet of tinfoil into a mould incised with a design, adding a filler to maintain the pattern in relief, painting or gilding the surface of the tinfoil, then applying it to the surface to be decorated. Its use can reveal information about the production process, the pedigree and transmission of particular motifs, the importance of silk fabrics or the collaboration and influences between different craftsmen. Every discovery arouses many expectations – and this was certainly the case with the applied brocade on the rear and side walls of the outer cabinet that came to light while dismantling the *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4).

The sheets of tinfoil, measuring 15 cm in width and 19.5 cm in height, were glued to the plain wood panels in straight, consecutive rows. They were composed in a traditional manner using a now grey, oxidized tinfoil that was reinforced with a filler (the composition of which is still unclear) and stuck on with a red, oily-resinous (?) adhesive. The red glaze of the highlighting seems to cover the tinfoil directly, while the gold leaf appears to be missing. Future analyses will have to determine whether the gold leaf had perhaps been replaced by a gold-imitating glaze. Thanks to centuries of protection, the fragile relief decoration remained in a relatively good state of preservation. It mimics a red brocade velvet, inspired by the much appreciated *a cammino* designs, with stylised pomegranate, pine cone or thistle motifs in lobed corollas. The relief pattern combines a contour around the plain areas with vertical and diagonal striations. The centre of the pomegranate or thistle motif was filled in with minuscule raised dots.

The relief decoration inside the wooden cabinet has been combined with a 'ceiling' painted in a matt blue. The red colour of the applied brocade continues on the exterior of the cabinet, decorated with little stencilled flowers, and is repeated in the background of the painted side panels depicting the saints. The finely wrought tracery of the cabinet's cornice and frieze have also been polychromed in red, blue and gold.

Textiles played an important part in furnishing the Enclosed Gardens: they were employed for the numerous silk flowers, as wrappings for relics or as background decoration. For example, the painted side walls in the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3) may have imitated textile. It might be supposed that the applied brocade's illusionistic silk velvet created a symbolically ideal cladding for the emotionally charged *hortus conclusus* and also intensified the opulence of the Enclosed Garden. However, the striking relief decorations were never on view and, ultimately, played no part at all in the Enclosed Garden's scenography. It may be that, visually, they vied too much for attention with the latticework of *paperolles*, relics and medallions. For the hospital sisters, the cabinet that was commissioned and delivered, including its polychromed and painted panels, would appear to have been largely a receptor for the spiritual and mystical paradise garden. The textile imitations disappeared entirely behind the uniformly black-painted walls of the inner cabinet, which in fact lent themselves better to the attachment of ornamentation than did the delicate relief decoration. Further study of the collected documentary evidence is certain to raise new questions and focus our attention still further on this fascinating technique.

¹ Ingrid Geelen and Delphine Steyaert, *Imitation and Illusion. Applied Brocade in the Art of the Low Countries in the*

Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries. Scientia Artis, 6 (Brussels: Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA), 2011).

The Mechelen Statuettes between 1500 and 1540: Material and Typological Study

FANNY CAYRON
DELPHINE STEYAERT

INTRODUCTION

Small wooden statuettes were produced in Mechelen from around 1500 and throughout the sixteenth century. Since the early twentieth century they have been known as the *poupées de Malines* ('Mechelen dolls'); in this essay they are referred to as the Mechelen statuettes.¹ Between 2005 and 2008, the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (federal institution KIK-IRPA) in Brussels conducted a wide-ranging study of the Mechelen statuettes preserved to date. This essay examines the period from approximately 1500 to 1540, which corresponds to the late Brabant Gothic.

Research into the Mechelen statuettes had been carried out previously², notably Willy Godenne's inventory of more than 265 statuettes, which was published between 1957 and 1976.³ An article written in 1959 by Joseph de Borchgrave d'Altena was another important source of information⁴, as were other more specific articles, museum and exhibition catalogues, and a recent article by Sophie Guillot de Suduiraut and Christine Lances-tremère.⁵ A digital inventory of the statuettes was compiled during the KIK-IRPA research project. By the project's end, this inventory contained more than 600 statuettes, including some small ensembles on view in domestic altarpieces or Enclosed Gardens.⁶

In the first part of this essay we shall explain the general findings from the study into the Mechelen statuettes. The second part will discuss the statuettes in more detail in four of the Mechelen

Enclosed Gardens. It was in these Gardens that the statuettes were preserved within their historic habitat. The full results of the study into the Mechelen statuettes – *Made in Malines. Les statuettes malinoises ou 'poupées de Malines', 1500-1540* – will be published in 2019.

THE FOUR MAJOR PERIODS OF PRODUCTION

We have been able to identify four periods of production between 1500 and 1540.

The first period (c. 1500-1510) was characterised by collaboration

between Mechelen sculptors and Brussels polychromers, evidenced by hallmarks from these two cities. Brussels sculpture is seen to have had a marked influence. During this period sculptors worked in a common style, resulting in a relative homogeneity concerning the statuettes that they produced. The statuettes' clothing was fairly sober: a surcoat (outer garment) worn over another garment, a wide cloak resting on the shoulders, draped on either side of the body or down the front in the form of a decorative apron. The saints' hair was carved in the shape of a skullcap on which a metal crown was meant to rest; however, the crown has been lost in most cases. Towards the end of this period we see the appearance of the first *bouurrelet*, which was a padded roll of cloth bordered with a ribbon and a string of pearls. This *bouurrelet* was usually combined with metal palmettes pinned around the forehead.

The second production period (c. 1505-1520) saw an end to collaboration with the Brussels polychromers and a reliance on Mechelen's workshops instead. Sculptures still bore the influence of the model adopted in the first phase of production. Fairly thick, deep, broken pleats continued to be the norm, but the Brussels model underwent a more liberal interpretation, leading to greater diversity not only in terms of style but also in quality. The *bourrelet* that appeared at the end of the first period became more commonplace. Costumes in the Mannerist style first appeared at this juncture.

The third period (c. 1515-1535) corresponds to an intensification of production. Although the Virgin and St Anne retained their sober costumes, Mannerist-style dress became more usual for the other saints (Ill. 74). A formula was devised with variants in the details of the decorative apron. With the exception of female saints wearing veils, the *bourrelet* became the norm and replaced the crown. Drapery pleats became finer and more fluid and rounder in shape.

In the fourth period (c. 1530-1540) the influence of the Renaissance was even more marked in the treatment of pleating. The speed of production accelerated, with a concomitant decline in quality. Nevertheless, attractive statuettes were still being created even then.

There were also developments in terms of statuette height. During the first two periods, the usual height was 35-37 cm. The third period saw the introduction of a height of 29-30 cm, which became the norm in the fourth period. This decline in standard height was the result of a process of rationalisation necessitated by large-scale production.⁷

In terms of iconography, we can see how the figure of the Madonna and Child became more dominant as production grew. This development could be explained as a result of increased production for the open market – in other words, not on commission. Demand was manifestly greatest for the figure of the Madonna and Child. Conversely, we also see more specific subjects appear, such as a statuette of St Bernardino of Siena, which is part of the collection held at the Bonnefantenmuseum in Maastricht.⁸ This quintessentially Sieneese saint could only have been produced to order and testifies to the international prestige of statuettes manufactured in Mechelen.



ILL. 74
St Catherine,
c. 1525-30, Museum
De Mindere, Saint-Trond

Without doubt, the high-quality polychromy of the Mechelen statuettes, with its attention to facial detail and its wealth of sophisticated decorative motifs, also explains the success of this serial production. The polychromy is chiefly characterised by the contrast between the brilliance of the gilding and the matt blue of the hemlines. The cloaks were systematically gilded, which was not always done in other centres in Brabant, where red or blue were frequent alternatives.

MARKS

The marks applied by the Mechelen guild of sculptors and painters are well known.⁹ The sculptors'

mark (or stamp) took the form of the three vertical stripes found on the city's coat of arms and known in heraldry as 'pales'. Such marks are found on the backs and socles of the statuettes, and sometimes under the base or the feet of the Christ Child. The 'three pales' mark rarely exceeds one square centimetre in size. The controllers most commonly applied the mark using a metal punch.¹⁰ Sometimes the mark was also branded on to the surface with a hot iron.

The polychromers' mark took the form of a capital 'M', the first letter of the city's name, and was visibly affixed to the gilded apparel or the socles.¹¹ This 'M' mark is always very small. More than eleven distinct types of 'M' have been identified; some remained current for long periods of time. There is a Gothic-type 'M' with curved downward strokes or 'legs'. All the other 'M's are Roman in style. In both cases, the diversity of punches used is striking, perhaps explained by the annual changeover of the guild's controllers. It is possible that some made their own punches, whereas others used existing ones.

A 'BRVESEL' mark often appears on statuettes from the first period, placed below on the socle, testifying to the aforementioned collaboration between artisans in Mechelen and Brussels. Of the sixteen known 'BRVESEL' marks on Mechelen statuettes, it was possible to examine and compare six in detail. They all appear to have been stamped with the same tool, corresponding to that used on the *Altarpiece to the Virgin Mary* (c. 1490-1500) in the Brussels City Museum.¹²

In addition to the stamps, we also observed some master craftsmen's marks. Sculptors' marks from the early sixteenth century are rare. The three known to date were described by Georges Van Doorslaer in 1933.¹³ Our study did not bring any new marks to light.

Polychromers' personal marks are more commonplace. According to our calculations, perhaps a quarter of the statuettes carried a polychromer's mark; however, these marks have often disappeared along with the polychromy and/or the socle. Unlike the sculptors' marks, they were visibly incorporated

into the polychromy used for the socle's lower moulding. They either take the form of a name in a rectangular cartouche, as with the 'BRVESEL' mark, or else appear as a monogram consisting of two initials or an acronym in a nearly square cartouche. These marks were usually applied with a punch. We have succeeded in demonstrating that statuettes bearing the same marks came from the same polychrome workshop. In other words, just as we had previously assumed, these are definitely polychromers' marks.

Ten polychromers' marks have been identified to date: six monograms and four names. In the main, these names and monograms were already well known, especially after Van Doorslaer's publication in 1933.¹⁴ However, we did discover one new name during our study – 'HEINRIC' – and we also found a few new statuettes bearing a previously listed monogram.

POLYCHROMY

Forty percent of the itemised Mechelen statuettes have retained their original polychromy. A great many are in very good condition, allowing an in-depth study of their polychromy. This can be divided into two categories: Brussels polychromy and Mechelen polychromy.

We know that production of the statuettes relied initially on collaboration between the Mechelen sculptors and Brussels polychromers.¹⁵ The peak of this collaboration was at some point between 1500 and 1510. Of the statuettes from the first period, all those that have kept their original polychromy have been attributed to the Brussels master 'I*T'.¹⁶ His polychromy is notable for the presence of 'applied brocade' – a form of decoration used to give a finishing touch to the hems of cloaks and other types of apparel.

Mechelen polychromy in the second period consisted of creative reinterpretations of the model previously established by Brussels polychromers. Applied brocade continued to be employed, but the sgraffito technique was an innovation at this time. This period was also marked by the first appearance of painted border motifs on an embossed background of the robes, created through the use of a 'roulette' (roll-on die).

The metal rosettes present on some of the socles dating from the first period were also used by the Mechelen polychromers. These ornaments were made by pressing lead or tin into a mould. The bas-reliefs created in this way were gilded and sometimes glazed, or painted blue, red or white. Interestingly, the same moulds seem to have been used for Brussels and Mechelen ornaments alike, and this suggests that they were produced in a specialist workshop – probably one in Mechelen.

The *bourellets* of the Virgin and the saints were also decorated with metal ornaments, pinned to the upper section of the headdress. Each statuette had four or five of these ‘combs’ or palmettes, but the vast majority of these very fragile ornaments have been lost. Nevertheless, traces of lead can still be detected in the small punctures around the edge of the headdress.

Painted decoration on a punched, embossed background is characteristic of the third and fourth production periods. The sgraffito technique found new uses in parallel with the development of more sophisticated costumes. Apart from a few exceptional cases, the painted decoration was placed on a punched background. Most of the flowers were represented in a naturalistic manner. A strawberry plant is the most typical Mechelen motif (Ill. 75).

It should be noted that while the sculptural quality of the statuettes varies, the quality of the polychromy does not, with the techniques and motifs always remaining extremely precise and neat.

We have identified some fifteen sculpture workshops and just as many dealing with polychromy. The statuettes attributed to them vary in number.



Ill. 75
Detail from the collar
of a mantle with a
painted strawberry
plant on a chased
motif

ILL. 76

Angel with a horn –
Garden with the Hunt
of the Unicorn



**MECHELEN
ENCLOSED
GARDENS**

A detailed study of the polychromed statuettes from four of the Mechelen Enclosed Gardens (*horti conclusi*) is provided below, with some of our findings.

The Gardens' protection behind glass has ensured that most of the statuettes are in an excellent state of preservation.¹⁷

1. The *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) is of particular interest. It contains a large number of statuettes that we can classify into two 'series'. Those from the first series serve to symbolise the purity of the Virgin Mary: the Virgin with the unicorn and the angel huntsman, the Tower of David, Gideon's fleece, Aaron's rod, Moses and the burning bush, as well as the fountain or well. The specific iconography of this ensemble, which is unique in relation to the production process as we currently understand it, suggests that these statuettes were made to order. The figures in this series are particularly homogeneous in terms of both sculpture and polychromy, and as a result we are able to attribute them without any hesitation to the same sculptor and the same polychromer. The faces have long, straight noses and large, slit eyes (Ill. 76). The figures' polychrome decoration takes the form of geometric patterns on a punched background. This decoration is very specific and does not appear anywhere else in the rest of the statuettes from this production period'.

The ensemble of Christ on the Cross, St John and St Mary Magdalene is less coherent. At first sight, this grouping is reminiscent of a Calvary, except that the figures of St John and the Virgin Mary in a traditional Calvary have been replaced by statuettes of St John the Evangelist, carrying the chalice and snake, and St Mary Magdalene, carrying the jar of ointment. Unlike the series of symbols representing the purity of the Virgin Mary in the other ensemble, this particular ensemble could well have been composed of statuettes of different origins. Although from a stylistic viewpoint the statuette of St John can be likened to those from the first series, this is not the case with the statuette of St Mary Magdalene, which displays different morphological characteristics: a rounder face, full cheeks and bulging eyelids (Ill. 77 and 78).



ILL. 77

In terms of the polychromy, the statuettes of both St John and St Mary Magdalene have applied brocade finishes, which is very rare in this production period and probably dates from an earlier period. Microscopic examination of this brocade has revealed differences in composition. However, in the absence of other common decorative elements, it is currently impossible to say whether the polychromy of these three statuettes is of a common origin. The polychromy of St Mary Magdalene is attributed to the master or monogrammist 'JE', to whom we shall shortly return. We would also like to point out the presence of small applied lead ornaments on the cross and its base. We shall return to these as well when discussing the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3).



ILL. 78

The disassembly of Garden 1 for restoration purposes provided an opportunity to examine the statuettes in detail.¹⁸ We were already aware of the 'M' marks, which were visible through the glass, but that was not true of the 'three pales' marks. Impressions were taken of these marks to enable further study, which led to some interesting findings. We encountered at least five different 'three pales' marks in the series symbolising the Virgin Mary's purity. This was a surprise, because we had expected this extremely consistent series of statuettes to bear the same mark. The statuettes would certainly have been presented to the controller of the guild on several occasions during the manufacturing process. On the other hand, we established that statuettes forming iconographic pairs – the angel

ILL. 77

St John, Christ on the Cross and Mary Magdalene – Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn

ILL. 78

Detail of Mary Magdalene – Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn.



ILL. 79

Moses, front and back, showing in close-up the Mechelen mark (three pales) on the back – Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn

with the hunting horn and the Virgin Mary with the unicorn, and Moses and Yahweh in the burning bush – bore identical marks. It is likely that the iconographic pairs were presented for inspection together (Ill. 79).

We observed greater consistency in terms of the 'M' marks. Christ on the Cross and St Mary Magdalene bear the same Gothic 'M', with rounded legs, which is quite rare and typical of the early years of production. St John does not display any 'M', but the gaps in the gilding on his apparel may explain this.

The other statuettes have been marked with a Roman 'M', possibly made using the same stamp. Therefore they could have been jointly presented to the polychromy controller prior to the order's delivery.

We can conclude that although this Enclosed Garden presents a certain iconographic consistency, it can be subdivided into two ensembles. Moreover, it is possible that the series symbolising the Virgin Mary's purity was produced in several stages.

2. The second Enclosed Garden to undergo a more detailed examination is the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6). The three main figures consist of the Trinity of St Anne (the Virgin and Child with St Anne) in the centre, flanked on the left and right by St Augustine and St Elisabeth (Ill. 80). A Marianum is located in the uppermost part of the cabinet. The ensemble is completed by a small bust of God the Father and two cherubs on either side of a floral wreath and a medallion.

Although at first sight the ensemble's structure would seem perfect and very consistent, analysis of the statuettes leads to a different interpretation – that the statuettes belong to differing stylistic types. St Elisabeth is attributed to the sculptor responsible for the statuette of the Madonna and Child with Two Angels at the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels.¹⁹ The shape of the eyes is distinctive. St Augustine's face is rounder, has more prominent cheekbones, is more elaborately

modelled and, in particular, has eyes that are less arched than those of St Elisabeth. St Anne's smooth, round and schematic face points to a third sculptor. The Virgin Enthroned above is yet another type that would appear to match the two cherubs supporting the clouds from below, whereas the two upper cherubs are very different. The two cherubs holding the medallion in the centre of the Enclosed Garden display another typology again.

The polychromy of the Trinity of St Anne and the two central cherubs is questionable in terms of their decoration. It is uncertain whether either the gilding or the silver leaf is original. The paint seems extremely thick and shiny, which we consider suspicious. However, there are not enough elements

either to prove this or to date this intervention. On the other hand, St Anne's socle retains its original gilding with punched decoration and an authentic 'M' mark. The polychromy of the other statuettes is original.

The polychromy of St Elisabeth was produced by the same master polychromer who worked on the aforementioned Madonna with Two Angels. The inscription on the latter's mantle reads *Maria Mater Dei ora pro nobis* ('Mary, Mother of God, pray for us'). On St Elisabeth's mantle the inscription reads *Maria Elisadeth* (Ill. 81). The typography, in a blue on gold sgraffito, is characteristic of this particular craftsman. Both statuettes also have very similar applied brocades.

ILL. 80

The Virgin and Child with St Anne, flanked by St Augustine and St Elisabeth – Garden with St Anne





ILL. 81

The polychromy of St Augustine is of another type. It is attributed to the monogrammist 'JE'. Named after his monogram, even though we know of only two such examples,²⁰ this master craftsman enjoyed a long and flourishing career. The polychromy of thirteen other statuettes is attributed to him based on a comparative study of the motifs and techniques that he employed. (Interestingly, the polychromy of the statuette of St Mary Magdalene from the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) is also attributed to him.) The lettering along the borders of St Augustine's robes' differs from that on the statuettes of St Elisabeth and the Madonna with Two Angels; it is more ornate and does not form words. A characteristic ornamental foliage motif reappears in several variations. It appears in the sgraffito on the underside of St Augustine's robes and on the strip of blue sgraffito at the base of St Mary Magdalene's robes.²¹

As a result, it is very likely that the statuettes were not all made by the same hand. Unlike the statuettes symbolically representing the Virgin Mary's purity in the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1), which were the result of a specific order produced by one craftsman, it seems probable that the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6) was assembled from statuettes purchased separately on the open market, consequently making it less unified.



ILL. 82

3. The *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2) is interesting from several points of view. St Ursula is at the centre, flanked by St Elisabeth and St Catherine (Ill. 83). In the upper section are two cherubs supporting a relic. The saints' names are inscribed on their respective socles. The first instance of inconsistency is that St Elisabeth's socle bears the inscription 'MARIA'. This led us to suspect that the statuette of St Elisabeth was not the original, but a replacement, a supposition supported by further examination. Her statuette is different in style and somewhat smaller than the statuette of St Catherine, while the statuette of St Ursula is larger. The polychromy also differs in both technique and motifs. According to the name on the socle, the original statuette would have been of a Madonna and Child. If that is the case, why would it not have been placed in the centre, and would it have been smaller than the statuette of St Ursula? These remain unanswered questions.

ILL. 81
Detail from a gilded mantle bearing the mark 'M' – Garden with St Anne

ILL. 82
Detail of the master's mark 'DOERMAEL' – Garden with St Anne

Ill. 83
St Ursula –
Garden with
St Ursula





St Anne (G6) has identical ornaments, which were very likely pressed into the same mould, despite the involvement of two different polychromers. Naturally, this raises the question of the origin of these ornaments. Were they produced by specialist workshops and then sold to different polychromers?

4. We shall finish by examining the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3). Although the polychromy in the statuettes of St John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary is not original – they were probably repolychromed at a later date – Christ and his Cross have been executed beautifully. A virtually identical Christ on the Cross can be found in the Enclosed Garden at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Arras. The cross is entirely decorated with gilded or painted metal ornaments. A frieze of fleurons forms a border along the four arms. The four extremities have been decorated with a large floral motif of four petals surrounding a central cabochon. The Cross and the socle have been further decorated with small flowers of different types (Ill. 84).

ILL. 84
Detail of the crucifix
socle, signed
'CORNIELIS' –
Garden with a Calvary

All three socles bear the polychromer's mark: 'DOERMAEL' (Ill. 82). This mark also appears on the socle of a Mechelen statuette of the Madonna and Child, which is in Berlin.²²

Here, we are presented with a consistent ensemble. With the exception of the replacement statuette of St Elisabeth, the statuettes and their socles were very likely produced by the same sculptor and polychromer.

Of particular interest are the metal ornaments pinned to the statuettes' headdresses. Decorative elements of this type have usually been lost and thus are very rare. On examination of all the statuettes, it emerged that the Mechelen *bourettelet* worn by the Virgin Mary and the saints was systematically adorned with such ornaments – as evidenced by traces of lead found in punctures around the *bourettelets*. The extreme fragility of these ornaments also explains why most of them have been lost. The Enclosed Gardens' protected state behind glass meant that a few managed to survive the passage of time. They were formed in a mould and then gilded. It is noteworthy that the statuette of St Elisabeth in the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with*

CONCLUSION

The ensembles of sculpted statuettes and elements in the Enclosed Gardens involved in this research project were either only partly sculpted and polychromed by the same workshop, or not made by one workshop at all. Research into the marks from the homogenous ensemble of symbols of the Virgin Mary in the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) indicates that the components were inspected at different stages, in iconographic pairs, and probably as the production process progressed.

1 The Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA) research project into the Mechelen sculptures was initiated in 2004 by Myriam Serck-Dewaide with the support of Christina Ceulemans and Emmanuelle Mercier. The authors would like to express their sincere thanks to them all.

2 A detailed bibliography and historiography concerning research into the Mechelen statuettes can be found in the forthcoming book (published in 2019) by Fanny Cayron and Delphine Steyaert under the scientific direction of Emmanuelle Mercier with the assistance of Famke Peters. *Made in Malines. Les statuettes malinoises ou 'poupées de Malines', 1500-1540*. Scientia Artis (Brussels: Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA)), with support from the Léon Courtin-Marcelle Bouché Fund and managed by the King Baudouin Foundation.

3 Between 1957 and 1976, Willy Godenne published thirteen articles in the *Handelingen van de Koninklijke Kring voor Oudheidkunde, Letteren en Kunst van Mechelen*.

4 Joseph de Borchgrave d'Altena, 'Statuettes malinoises,' *Bulletin des Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire / Bulletin van de Koninklijke Musea voor Kunst en Geschiedenis*, 4th series, no. 31 (1959), 2-98.

5 Sophie Guillot de Suduiraut and Christine Lancestremère, 'La production de statuettes à Malines au début du xvi^e siècle (vers 1500-1525/1530),' in *L'art multiplié. Production de masse, en série, pour le marché dans les arts entre Moyen Âge et Renaissance*, ed. M. Tomasi (Rome: Études lausannoises d'histoire de l'art, 11, 2011), 89-103.

6 The researchers also consulted the photo library and old treatment dossiers at the KIK-IRPA. Approximately 150 statuettes were studied and described at their repositories, and this included both detailed and general photographic images, dimensions and a systematic description of the polychromy. The database was compiled by Fanny Cayron and Delphine Steyaert, as well as by Ingrid Geelen in the first year of the project. It was updated in 2016 by Sara Pallemmaerts.

7 Ingrid Geelen and Delphine Steyaert, 'Considérations sur la vente et la diffusion des statuettes malinoises de la première moitié du XVI^e siècle,' *Il collezionismo locale: adesioni e rifiuti*.

Atti del convegno, Ferrara, 9-11 novembre 2006. Quaderni degli Annali dell'Università di Ferrara, Sessione Storia, 7, eds. Ranieri Varese and Federica Varatelli (Florence: Le Lettere, 2009), 19-49.

8 St Bernardino of Siena, Maastricht, Bonnefantenmuseum, inv. 4804, KIK-IRPA object no. 11021312.

9 See in particular: Camille Poupeye, 'Les jardins clos et leurs rapports avec la sculpture malinoise,' *Bulletin du Cercle archéologique, littéraire et artistique de Malines*, no. 22 (1912), 102-103; Willy Godenne, 'Préliminaires à l'inventaire général des statuettes d'origine malinoise présumées des XV^e et XVI^e siècles (fin),' *Handelingen van de Koninklijke Kring voor Oudheidkunde, Letteren en Kunst van Mechelen*, 66 (1962), 69; Jan Crab, *Het Brabants beeldsnijcentrum Leuven* (Leuven: Ceuterick, 1977), 61-62.

10 According to the regulations of 1564 for the Guild of St Luke in Mechelen, two controllers were appointed annually from among the members of the guild. The first articles of association were thought to have dated from 1500 and have been lost, as have the updated versions which underwent regular revisions throughout the course of the 16th century in order to keep pace with developments in the profession. The text of the new regulations of 1564 is all that has been handed down to us. Concerning this scroll, see Emmanuel Neeffs. *Histoire de la peinture et de la sculpture à Malines* (Ghent, 1876), vol. 1, 10-16; Adolf Monballieu, 'Documenten van het Mechels schilders- en beeldsnijdersambacht. I. De Rolle van 1564,' *Handelingen van de Koninklijke Kring voor Oudheidkunde, Letteren en Kunst van Mechelen*, 73 (1969), 88-106.

11 Poupeye, 'Les jardins clos,' 103-104; Georges Van Doorslaer, 'Marques de sculpteurs et de polychromeurs malinois,' *Revue belge d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'Art / Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Oudheidkunde en Kunstgeschiedenis*, no. 3 (1933), 159-176; Crab, *Het Brabants beeldsnijcentrum Leuven*, 62-63; Erik Vandamme, *De polychromie van gotische houtsculptuur in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden. Materialen en technieken* (Brussels: Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België, Klasse der Schone Kunsten, 44, 1982, no. 35), 173-174.

12 Willy Godenne had already reached this conclusion in part when he noted that the 'BRVESEL' mark on a St Catherine held in a private collection (at the time the Welker collection) was identical to that seen in a small altarpiece to the Virgin Mary kept at the Brussels City Museum. Godenne, *Préliminaires*, 1962, 74-75.

13 Van Doorslaer, 'Marques,' 159-176.

14 Van Doorslaer, 'Marques,' 159-176.

15 Myriam Serck-Dewaide, 'Matériaux, techniques et polychromies,' in *Retables flamands et brabançons dans les monuments belges*, Monumenten en landschappen, Cahiers, 4, eds. Marjan Buyle and Christine Vanthillo (Brussels: Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap. Afdeling Monumenten en Landschappen, 2000), 94-95.

16 Ingrid Geelen and Delphine Steyaert, *Imitation and Illusion. Applied Brocade in the Art of the Low Countries in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*. Scientia Artis, 6 (Brussels: Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA), 2011), 113, 210-215 (cat. 6), 332-339 (cat. 28 and 29).

17 The leaded glass was probably incorporated in the 19th century. The glass was removed to allow conservation and has not been returned for the present museum display at the Museum Hof van Busleyden (Mechelen).

18 The authors would like to thank the Enclosed Gardens conservation team who so warmly welcomed us in 2017 and allowed us to handle and photograph the statuettes of the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1).

19 Brussels, Royal Museums of Art and History, inv. 920 A/B/C, KIK-IRPA object nos. 20033417, 20045222 and 20045223.

20 *Trinity of St Anne*, Berlin State Museums, inv. J471, KIK-IRPA object no. 11016764; *Madonna and Child*, private collection, KIK-IRPA object no. 50007379.

21 See: Cayron and Steyaert, *Made in Malines*.

22 *Madonna and Child*, Berlin State Museums, inv. 80/74, KIK-IRPA object no. 11016794.



Alabaster Statuettes of St Anne with the Virgin and Child and St Jerome

JUDY DE ROY

ILL. 85

St Anne in polychrome
alabaster – Garden
with Daniel in the
Lions' Den

The *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4) contains two alabaster statuettes amid a highly diverse assortment of other objects. It is the sole example to include alabaster sculptures among the seven Mechelen Enclosed Gardens. Consequently, the use of this soft stone import from England in an Enclosed Garden can be considered rather exceptional. Other examples in which alabaster sculptures form part of the tableau are the Enclosed Gardens from the Stedelijk Museum in Diest, the Abbey of Our Lady of Tongerlo, St Andrew's Church in Balen and the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Arras (France). Despite the absence of maker's marks, there is no doubt at all that the statuettes in the *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* were manufactured in Mechelen. In fact, from the second quarter of the sixteenth century until the early seventeenth, Mechelen was the most renowned centre for alabaster work in the Southern Netherlands.¹

The statuettes flank the central sculpture in walnut of Daniel in the Lions' den and represent the church father St Jerome and St Anne with the Virgin and Child. The seated church father is depicted with a variety of attributes. The open book on a stand alongside him refers to his translation of the Bible into Latin: the Vulgate. The lion to his left and the thorn in his right hand refer to the popular legend in which

Jerome removed a painful thorn from the beast's paw. Although Jerome was never a cardinal, he was usually portrayed wearing a cardinal's hat and garments. His apparel owes itself to the fact that, between 382 and 384, he was secretary and advisor to Pope Damasus I in Rome.

On the other side of the central wooden statuette of Daniel is the sculptural group of St Anna with the Virgin and Child, a reference to the Immaculate Conception. St Anne is seldom portrayed alone; she is usually associated with the Virgin Mary and the infant Jesus as an earthly Holy Trinity. She is standing in a frontal pose with a slight *contraposto* and wears a long belted gown over which is draped a long cloak. Her head is covered with a wimple. At waist height, St Anne is carrying a person in each hand. Her daughter, the Virgin Mary, is seen in her left hand as a young girl with long hair, her hands piously clasped together. Opposite Mary, in St Anne's right hand, we see the Virgin Mary's son. The infant Jesus is dressed in a long tunic and he holds a book open in his hands. His lower left leg is bent slightly backwards, lending him a playful sense of motion. The profiled hexagonal plinth bears the legend in gold leaf: *SAN-ANNA*.

A separate piece of alabaster has been used for the plinth for each statuette. The original joints in the statuettes themselves are less conspicuous. For example, a small piece of alabaster was added for the head of the Christ child prior to its sculpture. The assembly of different pieces of alabaster when creating small works of art, as here, points to the costliness of the imported material, as well as to the thrifty and careful use to which it was put in the workshop.

The present-day partial polychromy is more extensive than in the original, which was probably limited to gilding of the hair and the hems of the clothing, as well as, perhaps, a few highlights for facial expression.

¹ Michael K. Wustrack, *Die Mechelner Alabaster-Manufaktur des 16. und frühen 17. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt-Bern: Peter Lang, 1982).

Gardening for Paradise. Plants in Silk, Metal, Glass and Parchment

FRIEDA SORBER

INTRODUCTION

Like many other extremely fragile elements of the Enclosed Gardens in Mechelen, the plants and flowers in metal, parchment and silk have been remarkably well preserved (Ill. 86). Careful investigation over the last four years has also revealed that in most of the Mechelen Gardens the ravages of time have been relatively benign. In most of the Gardens, the overall presentation has hardly been tampered with. Many generations of nuns have preserved them with reverence. In almost all the Mechelen Gardens is what we see today close to what the original owners saw in the first half of the sixteenth century.¹

Research over the last ten years has proved that the plants and flowers found in Enclosed Gardens, crowns and diverse forms of presentations of relics were appreciated and used in a large area of western Europe, comprising most of present-day Germany, the Northern and Southern Netherlands and northern France. They are now found most commonly in Enclosed Gardens and related presentations of relics in wooden altarpieces, *andachtsbilder* and crowns of busts containing skull relics. A small number have been preserved as individual flowers and bouquets of flowers. Most of these were probably separated from relic busts and presentations. But they may have been used in other items, such as crowns used by nuns for their profession, bridal crowns and possibly decorations for fashionable clothing.

The style and format used in the Mechelen Gardens corresponds fairly closely with most of the other floral decorations found in north-western Europe, and they all probably date from the late fifteenth to the middle of the sixteenth century. But both their style and production methods have much older roots. A crown, probably for a skull relic, in Halberstadt Cathedral (Germany) is from the fourteenth century. Some of the decorations used for the clothing of Virgin Mary statues in the so-called *Heidekloster* in the Lüneburger Heide (Germany) are probably from the fifteenth century. These decorations consist of crosses in metal wire, wrapped with silk and metal threads – the same technique as used for many of the plants in the Gardens. These techniques reached their peak in the late fifteenth through early sixteenth century. But they kept evolving after the use of miniature plants and flowers for religiously inspired scenes and amalgamations of relics and small statues had lost its appeal. Nuns' profession crowns with flowers of metal wire and silk remained in vogue well into the nineteenth century, and similar bridal crowns were used by fashionable brides in the seventeenth century. In many European regional costumes, colourful bridal crowns persisted well into the twentieth century, although many of the original techniques had lost much of the refinement found in their peak period of production. For reliquary use, silk was mostly abandoned in favour of the gold and silver threads that are prevalent in elaborate reliquary shrines popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in



Ill. 86
Detail of multicoloured plants and flowers in silk, metal wire and parchment, *paperolles*, brass discs and beads – Garden with St Ursula

Ill. 87 (pages 150-151)
Detail of flowers, a small bird and a snail – Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den







ILL. 88
Detail of a cluster of flowers, with X-ray imaging showing the metal components in white inside the flowers – Garden with St Ursula



ILL. 89
Detail of a cluster of flowers in silk, metal wire and parchment – Garden with St Ursula

southern Germany, Austria and Switzerland, where the techniques of *Klosterarbeiten* survive until the present day. Another survival is the *ganutell* work of the island of Malta. The exact relationship between the floral work of southern Europe and that of north-western Europe needs to be investigated. But it is clear that in both Spain and the Spanish dominions in South and Central America, exuberant floral crowns were used by nuns. Many more small religious scenes in glass caskets, such as the eighteenth-century one seen by the author in the cathedral of Lima, Peru,² may have escaped the notice of scholars so far.

In a non-religious setting, the techniques used for the Gardens were practiced within the contexts of English domestic embroidery, but they may have survived into the seventeenth century in other European domestic embroidery traditions too.³ Three-dimensional flowers fitted well into the format of objects like trays and small cabinets. The embroiderers, mostly young girls, often made 'pop-up' embroideries using a technique called 'stump work', but occasionally they made fully three-dimensional animals and flowers using needle looping and silk wrapping techniques that undoubtedly point to a transfer of techniques that were well known but scantily documented. Some techniques used in the Garden flowers persisted in very different guise in European passementerie traditions. From the sixteenth century onwards, passementerie survives, on items of costume, interior decoration, and horse and carriage gear, that is similar to some of the techniques used in the gardens.

MAKING PLANTS AND FLOWERS

The plants and flowers in the Gardens are made with a variety of wrapping techniques, mainly using floss silk thread and metal thread wrapped around cores of brass wire and/or parchment. The dominant colours of the plants are a variety of shades of green, red, orange, pink, yellow, white and occasionally bright blue or purple. When gold and silver threads are used, a silk core is spirally wrapped with gut membrane covered with gold or silver leaf.⁴ The coloured silks show various degrees of fading and damage. White silk (probably bleached over sulphur fumes) has

often partially disappeared. The metal-covered silks have lost much of their original lustre. Since, in some Gardens, many plants had to be temporarily removed to enable conservation work on other elements of the Gardens, the hidden parts of the plants often revealed the original strong colours and the shininess of the gold and silver. When new, the Gardens must have glistened with gold and silver, and bright colours, like three-dimensional versions of contemporary miniatures. But the hidden parts of the Gardens revealed much more. Since most of the raw materials used were precious, they were used sparingly. Often, silks and gold were only tightly wrapped where they would be visible on the outward-facing side of the final plant.

Just like the most expensive silk flowers in our own time, every single leaf, pistil and stem was made separately before being assembled into a plant (Ill. 88 and 89). For some of the larger plants over a hundred single parts had to be made before the final plant could be assembled. Flowers were built up slowly, starting with pistils, then adding petals one by one. When the flower was complete, with at least one brass wire protruding from each element, the total bunch of wires was wrapped to form a stem, adding previously made leaves to the stem as the wrapping proceeded. As soon as wires were secured by the wrapping they could be cut off, to make the stem taper. Often, sequins of different shapes or sweet water pearls were added to the tips of leaves, and to flowers, possibly to imitate morning dew on a sunny day.

Where the makers bought their raw materials could only be determined if one found purchasing records. It seems likely, however, that, as long as they lived in reasonably sized cities, they could find whatever they needed locally. They would have needed copious amounts of brass wire, which would have been readably available for a variety of trades. Dyed silk would have been bought in skeins from the suppliers of silk for embroiderers. Loom waste from silk weavers could have supplied some demands, but since most of the soft floss silks used in the Gardens could not have been used for warping a silk loom, this seems unlikely. Brass sequins in the shape of leaves, letters and simple circles or ovals would have been readily available. Although now surviving mainly in reliquaries and Enclosed Gardens, they no doubt served a variety of purposes in fashionable costumes, both for the wealthy

ILL. 90

Flowering tree, composed
of parchment, silk and
metal wire, with two
circular hoops – Garden
with the Hunt of the
Unicorn



III. 91

Pear tree, with pears
made from polychrome
wood and the tree
made from brass wire,
parchment and silk –
Garden with a Crucified
Christ



III. 92

Detail of a fantasy or paradise flower – Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den

and the not-so wealthy. All classes of society in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries relished the use of shiny decorations in their clothing, ranging from precious stones, metals and pearls for the higher classes to silvered or gilded brass for common men and women. The abundance of once-shiny dress ornaments unearthed in many cities is eloquent witness to this.⁵

But for some plants additional materials and techniques were necessary to render them accurately. Bunches of grapes feature prominently in several Gardens. Wrapping a small sphere with silk thread to create an individual grape or an apple would have been difficult. Most apples and pears owe their existence to wood-turners and painters, but for the smaller grapes a small sphere would be covered in purplish-blue fabric. Most of the grapes in the Mechelen Gardens consist of a cherry stone covered in purplish-blue or blueish-green linen or silk.⁶ Using different fabrics for one bunch of grapes resulted in a lifelike imitation of a real bunch of grapes. Techniques to assemble one bunch show considerable variations. In some Gardens, the bunches are sewn on to a linen base. In others, every grape has a metal wire and bunches are assembled by combining grapes, wrapping the wires and adding grapes as the wrapping proceeds.

Many plants imitated botanical species⁷, ranging from humble leaves of grass to complete apple and pear trees, bouquets of roses or even peas (Ill. 90 and 91). Once one learns to decode the stylisation, inevitably caused by the techniques used in making the plants, many species can be easily identified. A striking introduction of botanical reality into the Gardens are parts of real plants introduced in some of the flowers. Most of those must have added an olfactory dimension to an already dense visual field. This would have been very effective before the Gardens were totally enclosed by the addition of glass panes. A few flowers have cloves added to them.⁸ Many sprigs of lavender have tiny silk-wrapped flowers above a real lavender flower base. Sweet-smelling flowers were clearly much favoured by the makers of the Gardens.

But not all the plants in the Gardens aim to imitate nature. Apart from a few amalgamations of flowers and leaves to hybrid plants – probably a last-minute attempt to fill an empty space while ‘planting’ the Gardens – some flowers bear no similarity to any known species, while others show degree of stylisation that would be consistent with the stylised roses and lilies familiar from heraldry and religious symbolism. Large stems with beige (originally pink), white and red roses or yellow, white and orange lilies are placed between the statuettes of saints and the Virgin Mary in several Gardens. Although easily recognisable they are very different from the lifelike flora found at the base of most of the Gardens. It seems as if that lower layer (literally planted in soil – blocks of peat covered in green silk) represents a literally down-to-earth early sixteenth-century garden. What makes a number of flowers higher up in the Gardens different is not only the stylised shape of flower petals and leaves, but also the prominent use of gold threads and sequins, especially in the roses, that seems to transcend the desire to merely evoke dew drops.

The ‘fantasy flowers’ take the desire to leave the real botanical world a step further (Ill. 92). They are never part of plants, but always individual flowers, often situated at the intersections of cylinders of paper wrapped in silk fabrics, probably evocations of wrapped bones of saints. ‘Fantasy flowers’ are not wrapped with silks but with metal-wrapped silks, where often gold and silver are combined. This is not so visible today but must have been striking when the flowers were new. Sequins often play a major part in their decoration. Their heart is often a small (real or fake) relic or a small Agnus Dei in wax.





or artificial plants. All the plants 'planted' in the peat are lifelike representations of plants that would be found in sixteenth-century gardens. Before entering the Garden, outside the fence one sees plants with berries which were popular both in the sixteenth century and today. Berries are mostly made of semi-precious materials and glass. Brambles are reproduced in black glass, but gooseberries are mostly amber and redcurrants mostly red coral.

Behind the fence and almost invisible when the gardens are viewed are a variety of small plants, grasses, daisies, strawberries and buttercups, seldom more than a few centimetres high. Whether clearly visible or not, the same lavish care is bestowed on every element, be it a humble blade of grass or a daisy executed in tiny needle-lace stitches.¹⁰ In the firm ground of the peat also grow larger flowers such as columbines, lupine, lavender and fully grown trees. Apple and pear trees are represented to the left and right of the garden in two Gardens. Trees with hoops supporting the weight of carefully 'pruned' branches are reminiscent of the trees one sees in many paintings and miniatures of the period (Ill. 90). In one Garden they grow out of a miniature basket, flawlessly executed with the same basket-making technique that would have been used for a real flower basket. The lower section of the back of the Garden supports larger branches of stylised roses and lilies, flanking statuettes or crosses. The branches, sometimes over 25cm high, bear symmetrically arranged flowers. In the upper half of the Gardens, individual 'fantasy flowers' adorn the intersections of paper cylinders covered in precious silk fabrics.¹¹ Most of the flowers still in their original positions are executed in metal threads. A sun and moon present in two Gardens are made using very similar techniques to the ones used for the flowers. The highest register of plant life is represented at the very top of the gardens. Stems with small flowers, probably wild roses, alternate with bunches of grapes and grape leaves. All the floral decorations supported by panels at the back or top of the Gardens are fixed through holes¹² with metal wire, and occasionally small wooden pegs, where necessary.

A special feature of most of the Gardens are representations of animals, made with methods similar to the ones used for the flora. A magnificent 15cm-high peacock perches at the base of a statue of St Ursula in the *Enclosed Garden with*

ILL. 93

Detail of a peacock at the bottom of the garden, composed of silk, metal wire and the claw of a small domestic animal – Garden with St Ursula

THE 'ECOLOGY' OF THE GARDENS

In most of the Gardens, enough of the plants seem to be in their original position to allow speculation about the overall meaning of what at first sight looks like an overwhelmingly chaotic ensemble. Extensive conservation work from 2014 to 2018 enabled research on each individual plant and flower, occasionally enabling the conservators to replace plants, flowers or leaves that had dropped from their original position. Almost all the Mechelen Gardens contain more than a hundred individual plants, ranging from single leaves of grass to trees, in natural shapes or trimmed in ways consistent with garden design in the sixteenth century, and the occasional garland of flowers. The topography of the Gardens reveals a consistent desire to present nature in various guises. The base, fenced in by a wooden fence with a closed gate in the middle, hides a block of silk-covered peat.⁹ Peat, much like 'oasis' used by florists today, forms an ideal base for holding stems for floral arrangements, whether real

St Ursula (G2) (Ill. 93). Its body and neck consist of metal wire covered with padding, purple satin and wrapped blue silk thread. The wings, back feathers and tail are fashioned like branches of leaves. The feet consist of twisted brass wire, and the eyes are black glass beads. The *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4) sports a white hunting dog hunting a white hare. Several Gardens have birds perching in trees. Magpies in G4 have bodies covered with what looks like white and black pieces of woollen cloth. Other birds are made with silk-wrapping techniques. Most of the birds have the claws of a small animal as a beak. Totally hidden, before its garden was partly dismantled during the conservation treatment, was a 3cm-high squirrel holding a nut. The little beast is made with silk wrapped over a wire armature covered with a thread or fibre padding. Smaller creatures include several spiders and snails, and one bee hovering over a flower.

**MAKERS
OF FLOWERS**

Comparing the Gardens, there are many similarities in both the construction and the execution of the flowers. But a difference in

quality is evident in the *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4). The Garden is relatively small, but almost every element of the flora is made with finer threads and in more detail than the flora in the other Gardens. In terms of plant life, some plants such as the stylised rose and lily stems are strikingly similar in all the Gardens. For others, there are significant individual differences. The bunches of grapes are technically very different from one Garden to the next, although their leaves and general appearance are similar. Comparing the Mechelen Gardens with reliquaries, gardens and relic busts in Belgium, northern France, north-west Germany and the Netherlands, one gets the impression of a shared tradition of flower-making that may have been prevalent in all the areas where the flora is found. At first sight, wrapping techniques appear easy, so easy that no modern work on pre-industrial textile technology finds them worthy of notice.¹⁵ Nevertheless, wrapping techniques were widely used for a variety of purposes in many cultures. Worldwide, the flora of the Enclosed Gardens, a purely north-west European tradition, which would eventually expand into southern

Europe and Central and South America, was at the peak of its possibilities in the early sixteenth century. The people who made the flowers must have been highly trained professionals, with skills matching those of tapestry weavers or gold embroiderers. That the nuns in the Mechelen convent that preserved their Gardens for 500 years would have made the flowers in their spare time, as has been suggested, seems impossible. The number of nuns, and their limited recreational time, would have made the huge production evident in the Mechelen Gardens impossible. Since no guild regulations mention the making of flowers¹⁴ it seems likely that the flowers were made in convents with specialised workshops or by lay people. Many flower makers were probably based in convents and/or beguinages. In later periods, contemplative orders were known for their work with diverse presentations of relics. Although the skill set to make these would have shown regional differences – exuberant Germanic *Klosterarbeiten* are a world away from the smaller frames with gilded paper *paperolles*, popular in France in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. It seems logical to assume that some contemplative orders in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries specialised in the making of the flowers and possibly also in the assemblage of the Gardens.

But makers outside the religious sphere cannot be excluded. Objects such as bridal crowns may well have been made by lay people. Several cities like Mechelen had guilds of mostly male *passementerie* makers. Little is known about what they produced, but involvement in flower making cannot be excluded. Women making fashionable items such as purses cannot be excluded either. Examining the structures and techniques used in making purses – now mainly preserved as reliquary purses, but originally made as highly fashionable objects for men and women between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries – reveal workmanship and a use of materials not unlike the skills needed to make flowers¹⁵, and their use of raw materials was similar too.

When somebody wanted to assemble a Garden, the elements needed may have been purchased from several sources. Flowers from several workshops or individuals may have been used in one Garden; this could account for the differences in workmanship found in Gardens preserved throughout western Europe and even within single



ILL. 94



ILL. 95



ILL. 96



ILL. 97



ILL. 98

ILL. 94
Wild rose, front –
Garden with St Ursula

ILL. 95
Wild rose, back –
Garden with St Ursula

ILL. 96
Strawberry plant with
birds and snails –
Garden with Daniel in
the Lions' Den

ILL. 97
Hawthorn bush –
Garden with St Ursula

ILL. 98
Golden branch with
sequins – Garden with
Daniel in the Lions'
Den

ILL. 99 (pages 162–163)
Flower sprig with
six-lobed yellow
flowers, internally
reinforced with wire –
Garden with a Crucified
Christ





ILL. 100

Medallion in silk, gold and silver wire, with relics and *cedulae*, surrounded by flowers made of dyed paper and stiffened cut silk fabric – Garden with a Madonna

Gardens. The craft of wrapped flowers probably had its heyday in the early sixteenth century when the production of Gardens necessitated an extraordinarily varied flora, but it lasted at least until the seventeenth century when bridal crowns and floral branches were still in use.¹⁶ From the early seventeenth century onwards, silk-wrapped parchment was slowly replaced by cut paper or stiffened and cut silk fabric, as shown in the *Enclosed Garden with a Madonna* (G7), the youngest relic presentation, probably dating from the late seventeenth century (Ill. 100). Small flowers in cut and painted paper frame the central statue and the relics are arranged around it. Gardens obviously came in different

price classes: this is the only way to explain the greater refinement of the *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4).

Whoever made the flowers, men or women, they may have meditated or prayed while involved in the repetitive tasks of cutting stems and shapes for petals, wrapping silks, and counting elements as they were assembled to make flowers and plants. Whatever layers of meaning we see in the Gardens today, discovering exactly what the flowers meant to their makers and viewers over the last five centuries will forever evade us, unless written sources can clear up some of the many mysteries.



1 Many Gardens in both Belgium and Germany did not fare that well. Gardens in Ebstorf, northern Germany, were dismantled as late as the 1960s, their flowers preserved separately. Single elements of what must have been an Enclosed Garden are preserved in the Old Catholic St Gertrude's Cathedral in Utrecht. These were probably saved when religious troubles hit Utrecht Cathedral in the mid-16th century.

2 A small casket in the treasury of Lima Cathedral, dating from the first half of the 18th century, has both flowers and tiny archangels executed in techniques very similar to the floral decorations of the Enclosed Gardens. Seen by the author in September 2009.

3 English domestic embroidery of the 16th to 18th centuries has been studied extensively. Unfortunately, no similar work has been done for most other European countries, leaving a large gap in our knowledge of countries such as France, Germany and the Low Countries.

4 It is surprising to find this type of metal thread in objects from as recent as the early 16th century. Although common, even in very precious embroideries and woven silks in the 14th and early 15th centuries, gut-based metal threads had largely been superseded by threads consisting of metal strips covering a silk core. The more 'modern' type of thread is found in only a few flowers. One could speculate whether the makers of the flowers had access to 'old-fashioned', less desirable and therefore less expensive sources of gold and silver thread.

5 Hoards of costume decorations, including buttons and decorative plaques are preserved in the Rijksmuseum voor Oudheden, Leiden and in the Fashion Museum, Antwerp.

6 Reproducing the technique in 2015 revealed that present-day cherry stones are larger than their 16th-century counterparts. The resulting bunches of grapes turned out to be considerably bigger than the original ones.

7 The botanical determination of the plant species was undertaken by Hilde Van Crombrugge and Paul Van den Bremt, who studied the plants depicted on the Ghent Altarpiece by Van Eyck; see: Hilde Van Crombrugge, Paul Van den Bremt, *A Miraculous Garden* (Gent, 2016).

8 Cloves were also much in favour in later relic presentations in southern Germany. Whole crosses and other objects were fashioned from cloves in the 18th and 19th centuries. Did the idea come from the small objects made from cloves in (present-day) Indonesia where cloves were grown, or from clove necklaces used in the Arab world?

9 All bases except one consist of blocks of peat and are covered with the original, loosely woven, yellowish green plain-weave silk found in many other contemporary reliquaries.

10 Daisies are the only flowers in the Mechelen Gardens that are made in this way. Needle-lace stitches are executed in a spiral, changing the colour from white to red as one nears the outer perimeter of the flower. Needle lace as such did not exist in the early 16th century, but the buttonhole stitch that would become the main stitch in needle lace in the second half of the 16th century was well known at least as early as the 14th century. It was used in raised embroidery, the most luxurious example known being the 14th-century Cappa Leonis, a cope in the treasury of Aachen Cathedral. In the Mechelen Gardens it is also used to frame small engravings and relics.

11 The silks are tiny scraps of woven fabrics used in costumes and religious vestments. They range from plain weave and ribbed silks to silks with tiny patterns, velvets, figured velvets and embroidered fabrics. That the scraps used were clearly precious is substantiated by the fact that several coverings consist of small scraps sewn together.

12 The pattern of holes in the backgrounds gives precious information on possible alterations of time – even, fortunately, where major changes have occurred. Most of the flowers in the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) were reattached with staples in the 20th century, but their previous positions were respected overall.

13 The two modern dictionaries of textile techniques generally used by museum professionals – Irene Emery, *The Primary Structures of Fabrics, An Illustrated Classification* (Washington, D.C., 1966) and Annemarie Seiler-Baldinger, *Systematik der Textilten Techniken* (Basel, 1991) – do not mention wrapping at all.

14 Depping G.-B., *Réglements sus les arts et metiers de Paris, rédigés au XIIIe siècle et connus sous le nom Du livre des metiers* d'Etienne Boileau, Paris, imprimerie de Crapelet, 1837. Boileau is talking about the crafts in Paris in the 14th century, mentions many occupations done by women. But the only mention of flowers concerns florists making decorations with real flowers.

15 Four reliquary purses preserved in a shrine in the beguinage of Tongeren, probably dating from the late 15th or the early 16th century and currently under investigation, share several characteristics with flowers in the Enclosed Gardens of Mechelen.

16 The craft may also be responsible for renditions of gold and silver jewellery in wire and metal threads. Although no surviving examples have been found so far, a few depictions of jewellery on 17th-century portraits point to the existence of such early, relatively inexpensive 'costume' jewellery.

III. 101

(pages 166–167)

Flower sprig made of painted paper cut to shape, brass wire and a spiral of plain silver lamellae wrapped round a core – Garden with a Madonna







Elisabeth of Hungary and the Medicinal and Spiritual Apothecary

BETTINA LEYSEN

III. 102

St Elisabeth, the hospital's patron saint – Garden with St Ursula

Elisabeth of Hungary (1207-1231), the daughter of a Hungarian king, was married off for political reasons at the age of four to the future Landgrave of Thuringia. Even in her earliest youth she had demonstrated an extremely strong sense of religious devotion – assuming we can trust her maidservants' testimony. Her love of God remained constant throughout her adolescent married life with Louis IV of Thuringia. Both Louis and Elisabeth took inspiration in that regard from the religious movement founded by St Francis of Assisi. It was Elisabeth, in particular, who was quite radical in putting into practice the ideals associated with St Francis, including voluntary poverty, personal privation and practical works of charity. She did so to such a degree that Louis had to defend his wife's generosity against attack from his own family.

With her husband's support, Elisabeth founded a hospital, where she dedicated herself to treating the most wretched of the sick with hideous ulcerations. Her guiding principle was: 'Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me' (Matthew 25:40). However, following Louis's death in 1227, she appeared wholly subjected to the animosity of her

husband's family. Subsequently, Elisabeth moved to Marburg, where once again she founded a hospital. She dedicated herself anew to caring for the sick, together with the community of hospital sisters that she established. She even became a member of the Third Order of St Francis. Her confessor, the priest and assiduous seeker-out of heretics Konrad von Marburg, imposed on her a life of penance, castigation and fasting. Entirely exhausted, she died at the age of twenty-four. Straightaway, Konrad commenced the process of having her declared a saint. It took only until 1235 for this goal to be achieved, following extensive questioning of contemporaries and investigations into the miracles attributed to Elisabeth's intercession.

This *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2) shows Elisabeth on the left, together with a book, a crown and a small crippled figure, and wreathed in a multitude of flowers. Were the flowers in this paradisaal Garden chosen solely because of their Christian symbolism or were they also representative of their physiotherapeutic value (as herbal medicines)? On the exterior of the retable we can see the white dog rose (*Rosa canina*), while below are carnations (*Dianthus caryophyllus*) that have discoloured to brown and Persian yellow roses (*Rosa foetida*). Faded Madonna lilies (*Lilium candidum*) appear to the upper left, while Gallic roses (*Rosa gallica*) fill the space above and to the right of the crown. Carnations, lilies and roses were medicinal flowers and had been described comprehensively as such by Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), who in her turn had drawn from ancient sources. The Gallic rose and lily were used in particular for the treatment of ulcers. The renowned Mechelen botanist Rembert Dodoens, a city doctor in Mechelen from 1546 to 1574, also described the multiple healing properties of lilies and red and white roses. In the same vein as Hildegard of Bingen, his *Cruydt-Boeck* (1554) recommends the lily and Gallic rose as a means of encouraging the healing of wounds.

From a spiritual perspective, the five petals of the dog rose refer to the five stigmata of Christ, while the carnations refer to the nails of the Cross. The rose and the lily are archetypal forms of Marian symbolism. The white rose and white lily represent her virginity and purity, while the red rose refers to the Virgin Mary's sorrows. She herself is the rose without thorns, because the Virgin was born without original sin. When the sixteenth-century hospital sisters were piously reflecting on their artful creation of these flowers, and later, when contemplating these symbols of virtue, might they not also have been thinking of the medicinal properties of the flowers from God's natural bounty which they were growing in their convent garden for treatment of the sick?

Relics in the Enclosed Gardens

KATHRYN M. RUDY¹

Enclosed Gardens scream an aesthetic of accumulation. They can be visually overwhelming, and although many of the textile dyes have faded to a dull beige, originally they must have been chromatically profuse. That they form dioramas so crowded that their parts burst, like full and verdant gardens, must have been part of their appeal. As with all items of complexity, it helps to break them down into components to understand their genesis and function. They contain some parts that must have been planned and specifically made for the boxes, and other items that were found and incorporated.

Among these one might make the following taxonomy:

I. Found objects incorporated into Enclosed Gardens

A. Natural objects: stone including crystal, bones

B. Human-made objects: lead-tin badges (for pilgrims, eucharistic devotion), parchment paintings, objects moulded in wax, gesso, papier-mâché, beads, moulded metal trim

II. Items made expressly for Enclosed Gardens

A. Items probably made by male artisans: polychromed wooden sculptures, cabinetry, painted wings, manuscript labels

B. Items quite possibly made by the sisters of the Hospital of Our Lady: wrappings, silk flowers, twisted wire figures etc

These categories are somewhat inexact, since it is not clear whether items such as 'moulded metal trim' were commercially available for a variety of applications, or whether these decorative trims were commissioned especially for the Enclosed Gardens. One could consider that the items in Section II were constructed for the service of the items in Section I. That is certainly true for the manuscript labels, or authentiques, which fix the meanings of the items to which they are attached, and without which relics would be indistinguishable from garbage. Most authentiques are written in red, like rubrics in a manuscript, and like rubrics, they announce the content of that to which they are attached.² Paleography reveals that the authentiques in each Enclosed Garden were made after the items were gathered, perhaps copying diverse labels and unifying them into a single script, size and style. (An exception occurs in G4, with *Daniel in the Lions' Den*, where a relic from the site of the Annunciation was added – with a striking green label – as an afterthought) (Ill. 103). Items thus labelled include small bones, bone shards and pieces of stone. Is it possible that the complex dioramas primarily serve the function of preserving and displaying these cherished items? In this article, I consider the relics in several Enclosed Gardens and argue that the relics motivated the Gardens' construction. They are, in effect, elaborate reliquaries, and draw upon a reliquary aesthetic of accumulation that is much older. As objects from far away that have been incorporated into the Enclosed Gardens, they form nodes in a complex network of social relations.



Ill. 103
Label to a relic from
the site where the
Annunciation took
place (green ink on
parchment) – Garden
with Daniel in the
Lions' Den



LABELS

Authentiques (also known as *cedulae* or vignettes) announce the identities of the stones and bones as

relics. The role of the *naturalia* as relics depends on the authentiques' speaking for them, since without such labels the items would be mute. Indeed, the labels work on several levels. They give voice to otherwise humdrum objects. They connect the objects to places and stories from sacred history. They introduce a colourful crafted material to the Enclosed Gardens. And they also form a compositional element, not dissimilar from the role of banderoles in certain blockbooks, where the speaking banners form visual parentheses around groups of figures and thereby define narrative units, as in the *Canticum Canticorum* blockbook printed in the Northern Netherlands, ca. 1465.³ For example, on fol. 2r of that blockbook, Mary/Ecclesia and the two women behind her form one conversational unit, and Christ forms another. They are both identified and isolated by the banderoles, which not only convey their speeches, but also set them apart compositionally.

The visual language of banderoles is even bolder in an unusual singleton from the Franciscan milieu in Delft, which is riddled with red and blue text scrolls that elucidate the unusual imagery (The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 135 G 9, fol. 1v, Ill. 104).⁴ The image depicts an allegorical garden circumscribed by a wattle fence and accessible by a wooden gate, not dissimilar from the composition of some Enclosed Gardens. The female votary wearing the garb of a Franciscan could be the patron, although she lacks features associated with the conventions of portraiture: she is too generalised to be distinguishable and instead stands for all Franciscan sisters. Her speech scroll curls toward the gate, the latch of which the young Jesus controls. It reads, '*Mijn geminde is mi een bondekijn van mir*' (To me, my beloved is a bouquet of myrrh). Myrrh – a plant that tastes bitter like the pain of performing constant devotions and the burden of the heavy labour of reaping – gives a rich redolent fragrance when burned. To extend the metaphor: prayers, like burning myrrh, are beautiful when they are offered and rise upwards toward God. Jesus answers her by saying, '*Coemt in mijn tuyn, mijn suster, mijn brufid*' (Come into my garden, my sister,

my bride). Jesus' invitation includes a gesture: he extends his scythe toward her, as if offering her the opportunity to reap bundles of rewards through daily prayer at the canonical hours, that is, not only to walk in his footsteps, but to work in his footsteps and to take over the job that he has begun.

Inside the garden, Jesus has been harvesting wheat with a scythe. He has gathered seven sheaves, each representing a day of the week according to the labels that bind the waist of each sheaf. Each bundle comprises the seven canonical hours, drawn from the Psalms – '*septies in die laudem dixi tibi*' (Seven times a day I have given praise to thee; Psalms 118:164) – which are named on fluttering banderoles that extend beyond the top of each sheaf. The pattern of the banderoles, with their alternating red and blue texts, turn the bundles into bouquets, in which the wheat comprises stems and the hours flowers. The young Christ has been harvesting wheat, read metaphorically as prayers. The banderoles have multivalent meaning. They act in a diagrammatic capacity by labelling the various bundles and adding considerable meaning to what is otherwise a fairly abstract composition. This function relies on their visual placement. Secondly, the artist plays with their physicality by depicting the labels as strong bands that can be used to tie bundles of wheat together – they are, in effect, like long strips of inscribed parchment, and as such recall the small strips that populate the Enclosed Gardens. They impose order on nature.

ROCK & SCROLL

That authentiques should be joined at the hip with relics makes sense, for without a label, the status of a relic – especially a fleshless bone or a grey rock – could be ambiguous. Only the accompanying stories made the stones originally incorporated into these Enclosed Gardens special. Specifically, many of the material tokens fall into the category of geological relics that purport to have been taken from a place of sacred significance. For example, in the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary* (G3), which has Christ crucified flanked by Mary and John, one authentic near Mary reads '*vanden berghe van calvarien*', while another says '*vander plaetsen daer sint Ian baptista geboren was*'. Nearby, one reads '*van onser liever vrouwen grave*' and '*vander plaetsen*

Ill. 105 (page 174)
Label bearing the inscription '*vanden berghe van cavarien*' (of the Hill of Calvary), on the left of the Virgin – Garden with a Calvary

Ill. 106 (page 175)
Label bearing the inscription '*vander plaetsen daer dingel Gabriel Maria de boetscap braecht*' (of the place where the angel Gabriel brought the message to the Virgin Mary), on the left of St John – Garden with a Calvary







ILL. 107

Relic bearing the label
'*van den berghe van
calvarien waar de heer
die bittere doot op
stert*' (from the Hill of
Calvary where Our Lord
died his bitter death)
sewn on to a pilgrim
badge – Garden with St
Ursula

daer dingel Gabriel Maria de boetscap braecht'. Two copies of the same label, reading: 'Vanden ijse dat vroos opden kersnacht', are positioned at the top left and top right of the deep frame. Another announces a piece 'vander tafelen daer god davontmael opadt'.

Some of these stones have been given special treatment. The stone from Calvary is a piece of bright white marble, specially sewn on to a piece of contrasting cloth in order to set it off visually. However, in other cases, it's not entirely clear what the authentiques are marking. Other authentiques have been affixed to their current position around the sorrowing Virgin, or in order to frame her. The relics to which they refer may have gone astray. Likewise, in the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2), one finds a piece of white stone, to the right of Christ, stitched on to a piece of cloth with the label 'van den Berch van Calvarien'. Also in the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) is another label for a piece 'van den grave sinte Kathelijnen', which probably refers to the tomb of St Catherine of Alexandria, which was at Mount Sinai.

In other words, these authentiques labelled geological relics that all came from places in which important events from sacred history took place, such as the site of the Annunciation or the Crucifixion, which are memorialised in countless paintings; or else the relics are actual pieces from items mentioned or implied in scripture, such as the tomb of the Virgin.⁵ According to the authentiques, these places, in the form of pieces of stone, have been transported to the Low Countries from the Holy Land.⁶ Pieces of rock helped to construct a New Jerusalem in Mechelen, which is, of course, a metaphor for heavenly Jerusalem, the terminus in Christian mythology.

Significantly, the shrines' makers also incorporated some flashier stones into the mix: the crystals that represent water that froze at the moment of Christ's birth. At least three of these labels occur in the Enclosed Gardens. For example, in G2 (with St Ursula), there is a label for a piece of the 'ice that froze when our lord was born'. This indicates that viewers found the material curious and sought to incorporate it into sacred history by providing an explanation for its colourless crystalline form. Referring to the crystal as ice that permanently froze at the moment of Christ's birth is a poetic way of connecting a miraculous event with what must

have seemed to be a miraculous substance: a permanent ice cube. The fact that three of these pieces of stone have survived in Enclosed Gardens attests to the repetition of this story to accompany crystal or quartz. It also speaks to the desperation of the patients of the Hospital of Our Lady and to the grip that such unusual crystalline objects can have on the imagination. Stories, crystallised into labels, help to give sacral significance to extraordinary and awe-inspiring *naturalia*. The crystal was probably transported from elsewhere, as it is not common in the area near Mechelen. These pieces of 'ice' were wrapped, beaded, set on a red background, and therefore visually amplified.

Although the crystal dazzled its fifteenth- and sixteenth-century viewers, what characterises most stones is their very ordinariness, especially when they are in a fragmented state as they are in the Enclosed Gardens, divorced from grand monuments such as tomb slabs and altar lintels. While the authentiques mention a variety of stones, it's not clear that all these stones remain in the Enclosed Gardens, or whether some of them disappeared during various acts of conservation. Their authentiques might point to now-missing rocks, which may have been cast away as worthless. Perhaps they fell to the bottom of their respective boxes, and earlier caretakers – perhaps the sisters themselves – didn't realise their significance.⁷ Stones – especially the common grey variety – are desperately mute and say only what's on their labels. And yet, these ugly, dry, fragmented pieces of *naturalia* probably motivated the construction of the frameworks around them: their visual and textual contexts to give relics specified meaning and an aestheticised social skin.

**NUMEROUS
SMALL RELICS**

Whereas fancier reliquaries might contain larger pieces of singular, esteemed saints, the Enclosed Gardens are characterised by large numbers of relics that originated with anonymous saints who travelled in packs, and of other low-status relics for which there was a large, if not unlimited, supply. As well as the stone relics, G2 (with St Ursula at the centre) has an authentique reading 'een van den ghebeenten der xi m meeghden'. That Ursula had eleven thousand virgin consorts

III. 108
(pages 178–179)
Crystal with a label bearing the inscription 'vanden ise dat vroes' (of the ice that froze) – Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn



Vandē h̄se dat broc
ons heere gheborē



es at
Mrs

III. 109

Relic with a label bearing the inscription 'vanden haen die craeyde doen sinte Peter onsen heren gheloochente hadde' (of the cock that crowed when St Peter denied Our Lord) – Garden with St Ursula

III. 110

Reliquary, 15th century, St Godelieve Abbey, Bruges

justified the very large number of relics of them in circulation. Their ubiquity would hardly raise a Cologne virgin's plucked eyebrow. This shrine also contains one of the few non-human bones relevant to sacred history, that of a chicken; according to the label, the bone, which is undeniably avian in form, is 'vanden haen die craeyde doen sinte Peter onsen heren gheloochente hadde'. Such relics fulfilled a desire to bring distant events into a tangible present.

Although it is likely that some relics, and many authentiques, were removed during conservation efforts, it is more likely that some of the smaller, flatter assemblages are complete, such as the one now at the Abbey of Sint-Godelieve, Bruges, which has a fragment of a panel painting at its centre (Ill. 110). It is packed, with images, authentiques, and relics stitched to micro-pillows covering every square centimetre. Studying this, one can infer some of the compositional rules for assembling a Enclosed Garden: the main image is centred in the frame, with the relics arranged around it. The relics are distributed in symmetrical pairs so that those on the left and right sides mirror each other.

Whereas some relics in Enclosed Gardens are organised entirely around the order of the saints in the litany – which also imposes a strict hierarchy – the relics in the Sint-Godelieve frame are organised according to size.

The largest relics are at the top. These include a piece of the column from the flagellation, and a piece of the Holy Sepulchre. In the second row, on the left side, are tiny relics that have been wrapped in textiles: that is the organising principle of the items in this group. Mirroring those on the right side are relics of the Virgin and some of the most celebrated saints: John the Baptist, Peter and Paul. The Virgin's relics are geological: 'de lacte beate marie' (the milk of blessed Mary) and 'de seplcro [sic] beate marie' (the grave of blessed Mary). Relics in the next five rows – those flanking the main image – are even smaller. The cushions to which they are decoratively stitched enlarge the tiny fragments. An even less exalted category occupies the bottom tier: the great throng of anonymous saints, represented by bone and stone material harnessed in place by wrapped wire. These pieces fall under the extra-large banner 'Decem milium



martirium, Undeci milium virgini' (Ten thousand martyrs, eleven thousand virgins). What is clear from the example from Bruges, and may very well apply to the Enclosed Gardens in Mechelen, is that the relics motivated the assemblage's construction. The assemblage is primarily a vehicle for their display. The painting at the centre – a fragment from a polyptych that was already dismantled in the late Middle Ages – does not actually depict the saints whose relics are present; rather, it serves to give human form to the saints, to 'enflesh' them, make them more relatable and less dessicated and strange. In the box-like Enclosed Gardens, polychromed sculptures fulfill this role.

The Bruges diorama is so full of authentiques that nearly half its surface is covered in manuscript. In the taxonomy mentioned above, I proposed that the authentiques were probably made outside the convent, because hospital convents did not, for the most part, have a strong tradition of writing manuscripts. In an environment that does not hold the recitation and construction of books central, the dioramas become a visually tangible form of the litany of the saints, which was a part of most devotional manuscripts. While many convents of female Franciscan tertiaries, Augustinian canonesses or Birgittines had *scriptoria* where sisters wrote books for themselves and for lay patrons, the *gasthuiszusters* were busy tending to the sick and dying and did not spend their days writing manuscripts. Nonetheless, the few manuscripts in the possession of medieval hospitals reveal aspects of the inmates' concerns.

Hospitals possessed some manuscripts, although not in such large quantities as in other religious houses, and they were probably made outside and brought in. For example, some time after 1534, a sister named Albert van Myddachten wrote a prayer book and, according to an inscription added to its first folio, gave it to a hospital. The inscription reads:

Our beloved Sister Albert van Myddachten wrote this book and gave it to the hospital as a perpetual reminder and for the encouragement of those who read from it. No one shall remove it from the hospital without the permission of the mother in charge of the sick (Nijmegen, UB, Ms 303, fol. 1v).

Dit boeck heeft onse gemynde lieve suster Albert van myddachten tsamen gescreven ende gegeven int syeckhuys. in een ewige memorie. ende tot verweckinge der gheenre die daer uut lesen Ende nyemant en sal uut dat syeckhuys nemen sonder Orlof der syecken moeders weten

Sister Albert was a canoness regular in a house in Arnhem dedicated to St Paul & St Agnes. She copied the book on paper, an inexpensive material. The labour and gift it represents and the choice of texts it contains are what give the book its value.

Sister Albert carefully curated the texts, choosing those that would have the greatest currency among the sick and dying. The first half contains prayers providing indulgences, including exercises about visiting the Seven Principal Churches of Rome. A visitor to these churches is granted thousands of years of indulgence. As the book is written for the sick and dying, they are to 'visit' the churches in their imaginations. At the same time that they are mentally transported from the pain and physical discomfort of their current situation, they are also accumulating large indulgences for the afterlife.

A further gift that Sister Albert copied into the manuscript was the 'indulgence of the little stone'. In its entirety it reads:

Pope Paul III first of all gave anyone who has a pebble from the consecrated *Pater noster* stone – as often as he reads or prays the Credo, psalms, versicles, antiphons and collects – 1,000 years and 1,000 careens. If he is praying for the dead, then 2,000. Anyone who reads this on Sundays with a rosary will earn all the indulgences that can be earned within and outside of Rome, just as if he had visited the holy city, and also every Wednesday, every Saturday, on St James' day, and on St Lawrence's day (Nijmegen, UB, Ms 303, fol. 50v-51r).

One can imagine the sick person lying in bed, fingering the special stone, repeating familiar prayers and drawing comfort from the series of physical and mental operations. The stone – a simple object that imparts comfort – recalls the rock relics in the Enclosed Gardens. Is it possible that such objects were used to prepare cures and treatments, like the one described in the hospital manuscript?

PRECEDENTS

What is clear is that the rocks and bones had a healing function, and had at least purportedly travelled great distances to land in the dioramas, and therefore attest to a broad network of believers who gathered such objects, thereby imbuing them with meaning. In enshrining stones from the Holy Land, the Enclosed Gardens engage in a much older practice, as is seen in a ninth-century assemblage: a selection of geological relics from Palestine consists of a wooden box with a lid that slides off, forming a mixed-media shrine (Ill. 112 and 113).⁸ The inside of the lid has paintings representing events from scripture, which pictorially label the objects in the box itself: a quincunx of rocks, suspended in geological aspic, which have been taken from the places pictured. These places – the sites of the Nativity, Baptism, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ – present the highlights of the faith, including the Virgin Birth and everlasting life. Since Jesus spilled his blood in the Holy Land, as depicted in the centre of the box's lid, the land itself was a primary relic, and the stones taken from those places could be as significant for believers as the primary relics enshrined in the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris.

Pilgrims' accounts indicate that they did collect stone relics in the Holy Land. In the early twelfth century, the pilgrim Daniel the Abbot described the tomb slab of the Virgin in a subterranean grotto in Gethsemane: 'And on the floor of this cave opposite the door there is cut a shelf into the rock and on this shelf was laid the sacred body of our most pure lady and Mother of God and thence it was carried up uncorrupted to heaven'.⁹ During archaeological research of the site in 1972, it was found that the bench described by Daniel had been pockmarked by pilgrims removing pieces of it as souvenirs.¹⁰ Likewise, the Patriarch Foulcher included a piece of the Virgin's tomb in the package of relics he sent from Jerusalem to Conrad, Duke of Dalmatia, in 1156. If the authentiques in the Enclosed Gardens are to be taken at face value, then the structures present a variety of such relics as these. Of course, they emphasise items that are already made of stone, such as tomb slabs and the 'table where our lord ate his last supper', which is configured in the imagination as an altar-like stone table.

The relics in the Enclosed Gardens form the inverse of one of the most important early reliquaries: that of St Foy in Conques, France, the monumental sculpture created in the ninth century that began with found parts.¹¹ The face of the figure – meant to represent a female child saint – is formed from a golden Roman mask, a found object reappropriated for its new Christian function. Encrusted on the skin of the imposing figure are gemstones given as gifts in anticipation of miracles, or as votive offerings in gratitude for a miracle received. Included in St Foy's miracles is one recounting how the saint took revenge on someone who had refused to give her a jewelled ring. Her cumulative miracle stories, in addition to the sculpture's actual surfaces, which absorbed the gold and gems given to her, must have acted like behavioural clues to other pilgrims, who would have seen the aesthetic and heard the stories of her miracles and understood that donating jewellery to the shrine was normative and expected.

Both the St Foy sculpture and the Enclosed Gardens are formed around relics, and created from components not expressly made for their respective finished objects (jewellery and coins in the case of the former; the items listed above in I.B. in the case of the latter). Whereas the St Foy sculpture conceals the relics inside the figure and puts the gifts on display, the Enclosed Gardens put everything on display: figurative sculpture, labelled relics and a dense decorative armature to hold it all together. Whereas the St Foy sculpture impresses her onlookers with her imposing stare and her plethora of priceless materials, the Enclosed Gardens impress their onlookers with an onslaught of mixed media. Whereas the St Foy figure showcases materials of high monetary value (gold, jewels), the Enclosed Gardens presents materials of high labour value, items that cost considerable time to make. Indeed, each of the Enclosed Gardens contain within them the product of hundreds, if not thousands, of hours of labour.

Perhaps in the same way that the St Foy sculpture encouraged donations, those who saw an Enclosed Garden might have understood that adding to the cumulative aesthetic required a group effort. Indeed, the fact that the relics in the Mechelen shrines are small and numerous suggests that they have diverse origins and were the objects of many different transactions – that they were, in short,

ILL. 111

Wooden reliquary with
painted lid, 9th century,
Palestine



III. 112
Interior of the same
wooden reliquary, 9th
century, Palestine



ILL. 113

Bone relic swathed in fine gauze – Garden with St Ursula

given by many different people. As a hospital order, the *gasthuiszusters* would have encountered many people in the course of their work. As I proposed in 2015, it may have been visitors to the hospital in Mechelen who donated the large number of relics that have been incorporated into the various Enclosed Gardens.¹² Their donations may have motivated the very construction of the shrines, as seeing them may have inspired viewers to make their own donations. Indeed, the elaborate display of donations encourages further donations.

The donation of relics may have been part of two self-reinforcing feedback loops. The first was that patients who might have seen dioramas with relics were motivated to supply more relics

for further dioramas. The second is that the relics were understood to have healing properties, and that people in possession of relics would want to donate them where they could do the most good: to the sick and dying, who were in a hospital. It is not certain that the hospital patients would necessarily have had access to the Enclosed Gardens; they may have been in a part of the convent that was closed to patients. On the other hand, they could have been on display for patients in the same way that the Beune Altarpiece (Rogier van der Weyden's *The Last Judgment*) was at the Hôtel-Dieu in Beune, or as Matthias Grünewald's Isenheim Altarpiece was for patients at the hospital in that mountain village, to name a few.¹³



As with nearly all shrines today, visitors form a captive audience for various forms of commercial activity. Usually this involves selling souvenirs; however, in a hospital context, it makes sense that vendors instead sold items that would be of use to someone entering the hospital. I suggested in 2015 that if the sisters were doing nursing work as a form of devotional labour, paying them for their services with money might have been inappropriate. Analogously, sisters who produced manuscript Books of Hours for lay patrons sometimes wrote a version of the announcement ‘This book was made on Sundays and holidays, and therefore cannot be sold’. There was an injunction against working on Sundays for money. Giving the sisters relics may

have been a way for patients to compensate for their services without resorting to filthy lucre. If the *gasthuiszusters* did supply the labour for the hundreds of wrapped, stitched and rolled objects in the Enclosed Gardens, and arranged the relics in the resulting aestheticised next, then perhaps for them all this wrapping of inert but somehow living matter was an extension of wrapping limbs in a hospital context. By dividing their time between attending to wrapping saints, and wrapping sick patients, the later were elided with the former.

1 Note from the editors: Kathryn M. Rudy is full professor at St Andrews University. She has written several publications on the Mechelen Enclosed Gardens. This essay is based on observation and on photos of the Enclosed Gardens, as she was not a research partner in the project 2014-18.

2 Kathryn M. Rudy, *Rubrics, Images and Indulgences in Late Medieval Netherlandish Manuscripts*, Library of the Written World, vol. 55 (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

3 For images, see: Todor T. Petev, ‘Spiritual Structures in the Netherlandish Blockbook *Canticum canticorum*, ca. 1465,’ *LiterNet*, 15.03.2008, N^o 3 (100): https://litenet.bg/publish17/t_t_petev/spiritual_en.htm

4 The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 135 G 9, Book of Hours in Middle Dutch, Delft, mid-xv. For a full description, see: www.kb.nl/manuscripts. I am grateful to James Marrow for sharing his description of this manuscript with me in 2009.

5 As this publication was prepared during the conservation treatment of the Enclosed Gardens, I had no access to the final results from the intense cleaning and analysis of the Enclosed Gardens. I do not know exactly which relics remain in the boxes.

6 Julia M. H. Smith, ‘Portable Christianity: Relics in the Medieval West (c.700–1200),’ *Proceedings of the British Academy* 181, (2012); Lucy Donkin, ‘Stones of St Michael: Venerating Fragments of Holy Ground in Medieval France and Italy,’ in *Matter of Faith: An Interdisciplinary Study of Relics and Relic Veneration in the Medieval Period*, eds. James Robinson, Lloyd de Beer and Anna Harnden (London: The British Museum, 2014); and Lucy Donkin, ‘Earth from Elsewhere: Burial in Terra Sancta Beyond the Holy Land,’ in *Natural Materials of the Holy Land and the Visual Translation of Place, 500-1500*, eds. Bianca Kühnel, Renana Bartal and Neta Bodner (Farnham: Ashgate, 2016).

7 The conservation team was not able to reconstruct the multi-layered conservation history of all the individual items, so I say this with some hesitation.

8 Consult Martina Bagnoli, ed., *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, exhib. cat., Cleveland Museum of Art, Walters Art Museum, British Museum (New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 2010), cat. 13, 36-37 with further bibliography.

9 Quoted in Henry Maguire, ‘Ivories as Pilgrimage Art: A New Frame for the “Frame Group”,’ *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 63 (Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for

Harvard University, 2009), 136.

10 B. Bagatti, M. Piccirillo and A. Prodro, ‘New Discoveries at the Tomb of the Virgin Mary in Gethsemane’ (Jerusalem, 1975), 42-43, pl. 13; *Ibid.*, 136.

11 Beate Fricke, *Fallen Idols, Risen Saints: Sainte Foy of Conques and the Revival of Monumental Sculpture in Medieval Art*, ed. and trans. Andrew Griebeler (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015).

12 Kathryn Rudy, *Postcards on Parchment: The Social Lives of Medieval Books* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2015), 23-29.

13 Andrée Hayum, *The Isenheim Altarpiece: God’s Medicine and the Painter’s Vision*, Princeton Essays on the Arts (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989); Peter Murray Jones, ‘Image, Word, and Medicine in the Middle Ages,’ *Visualizing Medieval Medicine and Natural History, 1200-1550* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 1-24, here 18.



Ill. 114
Bone relic (lower
jaw) swathed in thin
gauze – Garden with
St Ursula





St Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins

LIESBET KUSTERS

ILL. 115

Bone relic of one of
the eleven thousand
virgins on a pilgrim
badge – Garden with
St Ursula

Flanked on either side by St Catherine and St Elisabeth, St Ursula stands at the centre of their eponymous Enclosed Garden (G2). She is richly attired and bears an ornamental crown, which rests on hair that flows in long strands over her shoulders. In her left hand she clutches an open book and in her right three arrows in reference to her martyrdom. At her feet, four virgins are emerging from beneath her long mantle.

According to one legend, St Ursula lived in fifth-century Cologne and was the daughter of King Dionotus from south-west Britain; her mother died in childbirth. She was brought up as a Christian and was universally acclaimed for her beauty, intelligence and piety. When her reputation reached the ears of Prince Aetherius, son of a heathen king of Britain, he asked for her hand in marriage. To avoid a war, Ursula consented on two conditions. First, Aetherius had to allow her to go on a three-year pilgrimage to Rome accompanied by ten virgins, each of

whom would have one thousand virgins in her entourage, as would Ursula herself. Moreover, the prince would have to study and convert to the Christian faith in the interim. Aetherius agreed and furnished the company with a fleet of ships.

The fleet departed, pausing en route in Cologne. An angel appeared to Ursula to announce that, after their journey to Rome, she and her retinue should return to Cologne, where they would be granted entry to the Kingdom of God as martyrs. On the return journey, they did indeed stop at Cologne, where the Huns lay in wait for them. After their refusal to consent to their wishes, the eleven thousand virgins were pierced with arrows on the orders of Attila the Hun. Aetherius, who had in the meantime also journeyed to Cologne, likewise died a martyr together with Ursula.

In all likelihood the story of St Ursula and the eleven thousand virgins is entirely fictitious. It is suspected that the 'M' in an original notation 'XI M' was not taken to mean *martyres* (female martyr) but was mistaken for the Roman notation for 'one thousand' – as a result the saint's legend speaks not of eleven martyrs, but of eleven *thousand*. It may also be the case that the reference to Ursula's companion Undecimilia ('the little eleventh one') was erroneously read as *undecim milia* (eleven thousand). Whatever the case, the story of St Ursula as the leader of eleven thousand virgins has long fired the imagination. A church was built to their honour in Cologne, where a fifth-century inscription still recalls their early veneration. In 1106 a Roman burial site was unearthed next to the church, and the bones found there were attributed to St Ursula and her eleven thousand virgins. Their cult and relics disseminated far and wide from the thirteenth century onwards. This Enclosed Garden also includes various relics *van den XI Maechden* ('of the XI Virgins').

St Ursula has enjoyed intense veneration since the early Middle Ages. She was invoked to assist in times of war, to favour a good marriage and to guard against childhood illnesses. As the leader of eleven thousand virgins seeking protection beneath her mantle, she also serves as the guardian and patron saint of young women and schoolmistresses. Above all, however, she symbolises the preservation of virginity. Within the context of the Enclosed Garden as a unique testament to the world in which sixteenth-century religious women lived and to their visual language, she appears in that capacity first and foremost as a figurehead, assisted in that task by the virgins beneath her mantle.

Metal Badges: Miniature Media of Great Significance

MARJOLIJN KRUIP

Although not immediately obvious at first glance, and at times concealed amid flowers or wrapped up and hidden behind relics and decorative features, metal badges have been incorporated nevertheless in many Enclosed Gardens. These devotional items are small in size – most of them measuring only a few centimetres in width – but large in number. As many as forty-four have now been counted across five of the Gardens preserved in Mechelen; the numbers vary from cabinet to cabinet. Just as in the case of other devotional items, such as the wax and parchment medallions, religious texts and relics, these small objects have been little studied or interpreted, if at all, as integral components of the Enclosed Gardens. In the past, attention focused principally on the larger sculptures and the painted side panels.¹ An Enclosed Garden is decidedly not a standard retable housing a few wood carvings and some paintings. The meditative function and spiritual power of the object is concealed within a melange of multiple materials and meanings. This is why the minor devotional items are also relevant in Enclosed Gardens.

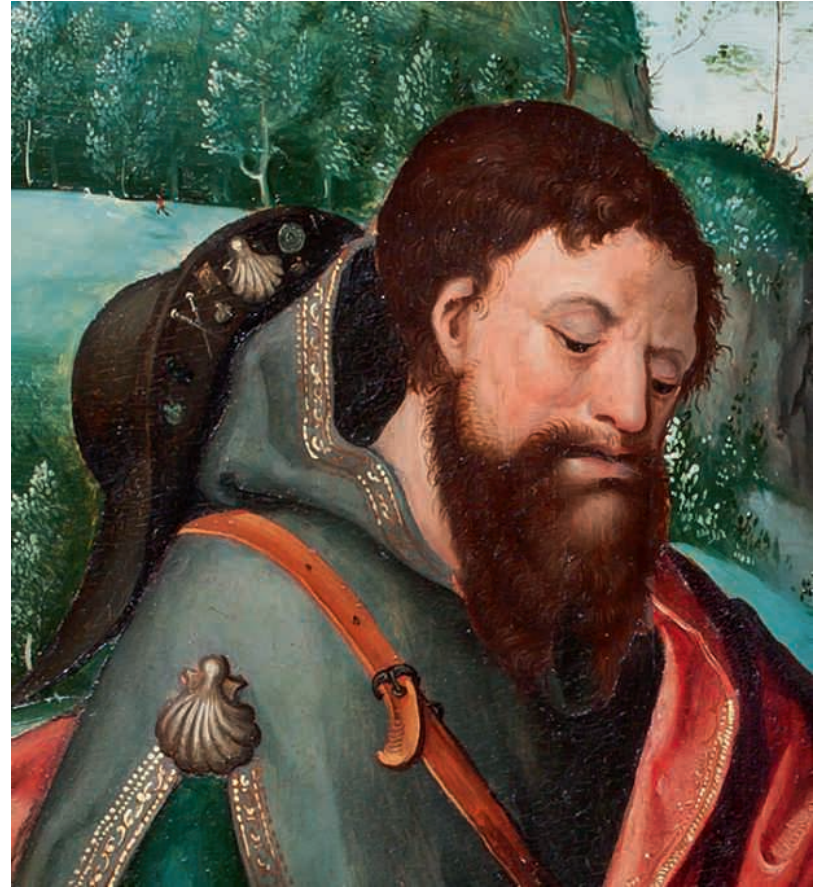
It is far from the case that metal badges are a feature of all Enclosed Gardens, be they in Mechelen or elsewhere. Moreover, there is significant variation in the numbers encountered from Garden to Garden. The *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2) has as many as eighteen badges, while there are only three in the related *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6). In contrast to these large cabinets, there is the small Enclosed Garden from St Andrew's Church in Balen with five badges.² Then again, two of the Gardens kept in Mechelen have no metal badges at all (G5, G7), as is also the case regarding those in, for example, Herentals,

Antwerp, Kalkar and Arras.³ It would appear that the badges were a non-essential ingredient, unlike other devotional items such as relics and wax representations of the Agnus Dei.⁴ On occasions when badges were added, it was done on the basis of a personal affinity that the commissioner or user of the Garden had with the trinket.

Consequently, the badges represent a valuable material source of information concerning the commissioners and (first) users of the Enclosed Gardens. In actual fact, these were not by definition the Mechelen hospital sisters – as has been traditionally assumed, purely on the basis of the conservation of the Gardens in the Hospital of Our Lady and the presence of hospital sisters on a few of the side panels (G2, G3, G6). However, the recent restoration and conservation project has revealed that the hospital sisters on the side panels of the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6) were a later addition; dating the painting of other side panels is still under discussion.⁵ Furthermore, following the example of James Weale, Andrea Pearson has recently identified the persons portrayed on the side panels of the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2) as well-to-do citizens accompanied by their daughter, a hospital sister. In that connection, she considers the Enclosed Garden to be the product of a social dynamic involving both the hospital and the secular world beyond.⁶ It had been known for some time that secular and religious people from outside the Mechelen hospital were commissioning Enclosed Gardens; we have only to look at the collections held by Margaret of Austria (1480-1530) and by Cardinal Albert of Brandenburg (1490-1545).⁷ In short, the time-honoured paradigm of the Mechelen hospital as

an exclusive commissioner and also as the production centre of all manner of Enclosed Gardens preserved in Mechelen and beyond requires debate and qualification.⁸ This essay seeks to address questions relating to the commissioning of the Enclosed Gardens on the basis of their badges.

We follow the cultural-historical introduction to badges with an analysis of the examples found in the Mechelen Gardens in terms of their iconology, place of origin and application. To what purpose were they incorporated? What was their meaning for the commissioner or the user? Moreover, can we detect commonalities or differences in respect of each Garden? Self-evidently, it is no longer possible to determine precisely when badges were added to the Gardens or when they disappeared. These trinkets could be removed just as easily as they could be added, and without harming the rest of the collection. However, none of the Mechelen cabinets displays definite traces of removed badges. For that reason – and in the absence of an alternative approach – our point of departure is based on the present-day situation.



BADGES

Badges are objects that in terms of their form, material and design reveal an aspect of an individual or group's identity. The word is customarily used to denote the small decorations (in the sense of items of jewellery) that were mass-produced and popular throughout all classes of society in the late Middle Ages. The images used for badges vary and convey aspects of medieval thought: folk stories, literature, knowledge, belief and superstition. Badges were attached to garments, headwear and clothing accessories. People would identify themselves with the symbol by attaching it to their body or clothing and wearing it. In other words, identification not only with whatever the item portrayed but also with the substance used in its creation. Naturally enough, the look of glittering, costly gold had an effect very different from that produced by cheap pewter, paper or wood.⁹

The decoration disclosed an aspect of the wearer's identity. For example, on one of the side panels to the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2), it is through his badges that St James personifies the archetypal late medieval pilgrim; in addition to his

ILL. 116

St James the Greater with two crossed pilgrim's staffs on his hat, a vera icon, and three small scallop shells and one large one – detail from the left shutter of the Garden with St Ursula



Ill. 117

staff, bottle gourd and knapsack, he is displaying clearly and prominently on his upper arm a pilgrim's scallop shell (*Pecten jacobaeus*) and on his head two crossed pilgrim's staffs, a vera icon, three small pilgrim's scallops and one large St James' shell or king scallop (*Pecten maximus*), as well as two metal badges (Ill. 116). All these decorations or badges could be purchased as souvenirs at sites of pilgrimage.

The religious metal badges at the heart of this matter served not only as badges of identification or commemoration, but also performed a powerful function as amulets; they afforded the wearer protection by way of the image or thanks to having been literally in contact with a shrine. Moreover, they were used as a tool for contemplation. Owing to their multi-functionality, religious badges were not simply bodily adornments. Leaving aside the Enclosed Gardens, they are also encountered in other reliquaries, in manuscripts, on rosaries, on church bells and pewter vessels, and they were also incorporated in walls.¹⁰



Ill. 118

PERSONAL MASS-PRODUCED ITEMS

Paradoxically, most of the highly personal and efficacious badges handed down to us were mass-produced items. Badges commonly measure only a few centimetres across and come in a multitude of forms.¹¹ The examples in the Mechelen Enclosed Gardens were made from silver, pewter or brass (an alloy of copper and zinc). Some are to a greater or lesser degree either dark grey or show a greenish oxidised patina. Badges were either cast in moulds or else craftsmen would use form blocks or stamps to punch, press or strike the images into metal plates. On occasion they would be engraved afterwards.¹² Colour was applied to parts of the image to accentuate details, such as red paint to represent the Holy Fire at the feet of St Anthony the Abbot on the badge from Bailleul (Belle) (Ill. 117).

An example of a badge that was not a mass-produced item, owing to the highly labour-intensive nature of its manufacture and also its rarity, is that seen in the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) (Ill. 118), showing an angel who is pointing the Christ Child to the Cross with the *arma Christi* on either side.¹³ It is composed of

ILL. 117
Pilgrim badge
from Bailleul with
St Anthony the Great –
Garden with the Hunt
of the Unicorn

ILL. 118
Pilgrim badge with
an angel that points
the Christ Child to the
Cross, with the *arma
Christi* on either side –
Garden with the Hunt
of the Unicorn

three small brass plates soldered together: a flat sheet of metal underneath, with a plate on top of this displaying an openwork pattern of squares that serves as background decoration, and, lastly, a plate with the main tableau. The whole thing is fastened together with a decorative border. The tableau has been enamelled subsequently.

AN ICONOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE COLLECTION

Apart from the one example with the pair of royal lovers (G1), all the badges in the Enclosed Gardens display religious tableaux (see table, p. 206). As a

result, and seen from the perspective of badges as a means of identification, they emphasise first and foremost the commissioner or user's Christian identity: nun, monk, cleric or layperson. The depictions can be subdivided into three categories, which will now be discussed in more detail: the Virgin Mary; Christ; and saints. In that regard, we

shall be looking at the extent to which there is an iconological correlation with the other elements in an Enclosed Garden and what that implies about the function of the badges.

The largest category concerns the Virgin Mary badges. Most of these present the Mother of God enthroned with the Christ Child (G1, G2, G3, G6). They emphasise the exclusive motherhood of the Virgin Mary (Ill. 119). Another type of Virgin Mary badge is found only in the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1), and in that case in eight instances: a Tudor rose is the setting for the Annunciation in which the archangel Gabriel announces to Mary that she is to bear the Son of God (Luke 1:26-38). Several badges of this type were found in London (Ill. 120).¹⁴ Their eightfold presence in this particular Enclosed Garden is revealing. After all, the Virgin Mary is not alone in having been chosen to receive a divine message; there are parallels in the sculptures of Gideon and Moses. In addition, the locked octagonal tower, the golden spring, Aaron's flowering rod, the burning bush,

Ill. 119
Pilgrim badge with the Virgin Mary enthroned with the Christ Child – Garden with St Anne





Gideon's golden fleece and the golden urn holding manna are all symbols of the virginity that also characterises the Virgin Mary. The presence of the unicorn – Christ – which permits capture only by a virgin – Mary – alludes once again to this Garden's central theme: the situation whereby the Virgin Mary with her immaculate soul received Christ in her lap and gave life to Him.¹⁵

In other words, this Garden is not an isolated case. Although it may not seem immediately obvious to the contemporary observer, the Mechelen *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4) is closely related in iconological terms. Just as Christ was born of Mary without the seal of her virginity being broken, so too in this case the prophet Habakkuk brings food to Daniel without breaking the seal of the lions' den.¹⁶ This Garden contains a badge with a mysterious heavenly shrine to the Virgin Mary with Marian relics that derived from Wavre.¹⁷ There are also highly significant relics that refer to the Birth and Annunciation, as can be deduced from the inscription on the parchment *cedula*: *Vand plaetsé d' dingel gabel ma de boetscap bra[cht]* ('From the place where the angel Gabriel brought the message to Mary'). In other Mechelen Gardens, Christ's anthropogenesis in the Virgin Mary's lap also plays a role, albeit a less prominent and dominant one.

The sole profane badge with the royal lovers in the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) must also be explained within this Marian context. The edge lettering *PRENES ENGRE* is a quotation from a stanza in Christine de Pisan's *Cent Ballades*: *Ce jour de l'an que l'en doit estrener, [...] Prenez en gré le don de votre amant* ('This new year's day that we must inaugurate, [...] Cordially accept the gift from your beloved').¹⁸ This text can also be found in all manner of luxury wedding gifts to celebrate courtly and monogamous love.¹⁹ In this case, the badge may serve to symbolise the purity of the user's love for Christ and is being celebrated in the same manner as in the paradisiacal *Enclosed Garden of the Song of Songs* (4:12-15) (Ill. 121).

The second category of badges, with images of Christ (without the Virgin Mary), all relate to the Crucifixion. In the opulent, enamelled badge in the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1), an angel indicates to the Christ Child the fate that awaits him: the Cross and on either side of it the *arma Christi*: the instruments of the Passion



with which Christ was tortured and mocked in his last hours. The *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2) contains a badge with the vera icon, the impression of Christ's face left behind on Veronica's veil as he was carrying the cross up the hill of Golgotha (Calvary). The face is surrounded by the first lines of a popular prayer: *SALVE SANTA FACIES NOSTRIS REDE[m]PTOR[is]* ('Greetings, Holy Countenance of Our Redeemer'). Another badge in a different *Enclosed Garden* (G3) also shows the crucified Christ with two angels.

The theme of the Crucifixion is not limited to the badges and is omnipresent. In many of the *Enclosed Gardens*, in and outside Mechelen, this culminates in a centrally situated sculpture of the crucified Christ (G1, G3, G5). This is also expressed in other media, ranging from a parchment medallion painted with the Cross and the instruments of the Passion above the crucified Christ (G1) to a plaque of pipe clay showing the Christ Child bearing the Cross and, surrounding this, the instruments of the Passion (G4).²⁰ Several *Enclosed Gardens* contain relics from the Crucifixion, which are identified on a small parchment label (*cedula*): for instance, *Vande berch vā caluarie & ons heerdie bitter dootop sterft* ('From Golgotha and Our Lord who died his bitter death there') (G2).²¹ Bunches of grapes

Ill. 120

Pilgrim badge bearing the Tudor rose with the Annunciation – Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn

Ill. 121

Pilgrim badge with a pair of royal lovers – Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn

III. 122

Pilgrim badge with
St Nicholas from
Saint-Nicolas-de-Port –
Garden with St Ursula

made of cherry stones wrapped in silk refer to the blood that flowed from the Crucifixion (G1, G2, G3, G5, G6). Other objects raise Christological ideas concerning the meaning of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection that followed it: the many wax images of the Agnus Dei on which the risen Christ or Lamb of God appear (G1, G2, G3, G4), or the *noli me tangere* scenes showing Christ and Mary Magdalene in sculpture and on a large brass medallion (G2).

What was the message that all these devotional items of the Passion announced to Christian users of the Gardens? A text on either side of the fence in the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3) provides the answer: *Xps is voer ons ghestoruē in grot' noot inden berch van caluariē die alder bitterste doot: In Ihs wondē is ons ghenade ende verlatenisse van onsen misdaden ēn sonden* ('Christ died for us in great need at the Hill of Golgotha where he met the bitterest death: our grace and the forgiveness of our misdeeds and sins is in the wounds of Jesus').²² The faithful had to be fully aware that Christ had given them the gift of mercy and redemption from sin through his Crucifixion.

This iconological analysis demonstrates that up to this point the badges lent support to the most important themes, their specific focus varying from Garden to Garden. Accordingly, badges in Enclosed Gardens served as contemplative tools.

The third category, that of the saints' badges, presents a departure from that approach. Depicted with attributes that refer to their martyrdom, the saints serve as human imitators of the Crucified Christ (III. 122). That being the case, they performed an exemplary function for the Christian commissioner(s) and user(s) of an Enclosed Garden. Nevertheless, from an iconological perspective the saints' badges are not as interrelated as the Virgin Mary and Christ badges. Drawing up an inventory of these badges reveals a diversity of male and female saints with little duplication (see table, p. 206). No strong iconological connection would appear to exist between all the saints in the five Mechelen Enclosed Gardens in relation to the saints seen in sculpture, the side panels and the relics, nor in relation to the hospital sisters.²³ At best we might surmise that the diversity of saints provided a form of joint protection against a host of physical complaints, which might point to some connection with the variety of illnesses encountered at the Hospital of Our Lady. All the same,

such an assumption remains premature without proof of the involvement of the hospital in the commission or creation of the Enclosed Gardens, and until it becomes clear whether the Enclosed Gardens were originally displayed in a public or private space.

However, in the absence of iconological embedding, exactly what *can* we say about the function of the badges with saints?

PILGRIM AND/OR COLLECTOR?

Badges with religious images are also termed and treated as pilgrim or pilgrimage badges. In such cases, the image and text correspond to saints and shrines at specific sites of pilgrimage. One such example can be seen in the badges from Wezemaal, which refer to the prophet Job's cult image that was venerated there (G2, G3). On the badge in the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3), Job is portrayed as a semi-clad plague victim on a dunghill; he hands over a disc with a cross to the musicians next to him. Moreover, the badge displays the coat of arms of the De Brimeu-de Rambures family, which governed the manor of Wezemaal. Even in the fifteenth century, Wezemaal was a place of active devotion. On St Job's Day in 1472, for example, as many as 636 badges were sold to pilgrims, with several thousand more being sold throughout the rest of the year.²⁴ These badges served as souvenirs so that pilgrims could show which pilgrimage they had made. Additionally, the badges also functioned as amulets via their images, blessings or because they had come into physical contact with a shrine.²⁵ In the case of Job this meant protection against the plague and other infectious diseases.

Strictly speaking, however, the term 'pilgrim's badge' or 'pilgrimage badge' is too restrictive, because not all badges with religious depictions can be connected to a specific site of pilgrimage.²⁶ Moreover, the badge wearer or owner might not have been physically on pilgrimage per se. Badges could also be purchased on behalf of someone else and given as gifts or passed on as heirlooms.²⁷

Of the badges in the Enclosed Gardens that can be attributed to a place of origin (see table, p. 206), the ones from Diegem, Leuven and Wezemaal are the closest geographically to Mechelen (they are



ILL. 123

Pilgrim badge with
St Adrian from
Geraardsbergen –
Garden with St Ursula



18, 24 and 24 kilometres away, respectively).²⁸ With regard to the brass badges from Diegem, with Cornelius in full papal attire and bearing the patriarchal cross (G2), three related pewter examples were found in Mechelen.²⁹ The pilgrimage sites of Wezemaal, Halle (roughly 40 kilometres away) and Geraardsbergen (58 kilometres) have been represented in the Enclosed Gardens on several occasions. The furthest place of origin to the south-west is Bailleul (now in France), to the south-east, Saint-Nicolas-de-Port in Lorraine (France) and to the east Düren (Germany) (Ill. 123 and 126). Nevertheless, this summary tells us very little about the pilgrims who collected the badges. The only conclusion that can be drawn is that there are no direct indicators for the existence of one pilgrim/commissioner per

Enclosed Garden, who, from Mechelen, collected intrinsically analogous badges together within a limited geographical context. This is indeed the case with regard to the Enclosed Garden from Balen, for example, which implies that the pilgrim, the commissioner and the first user of the object were one and the same person.³⁰

Irrespective of where the Enclosed Gardens originated, with regard to the ones that came to be kept at the Augustinian nuns' hospital it is important to ascertain whether there is any possibility at all that the pilgrim came from the hospital. Strikingly, a relatively large number of badges are present in those Enclosed Gardens with secular (co-)commissioners or patrons on the painted side panels (G2, G3). Moreover, few if any convent

manuscripts with badges have survived.³¹ Were the hospital sisters excluded from going on actual pilgrimages themselves? The statutes of 1509 for the Hospital of Our Lady deal with everyday rules of conduct and duties, but they do not provide any guidelines concerning physical pilgrimage.³² The lives of the sixteen hospital sisters was strictly regulated and focused on tending to the sick. If it is true that they could not go on pilgrimage, the nuns would still have had opportunities for collecting badges. In point of fact, they were permitted to keep the possessions of patients who had died.³³ It is also possible that they received badges as gifts from guests who had made a recovery. The role of collector was better suited to hospital sisters than that of pilgrim. A collection of badges would have afforded them the opportunity of making a virtual pilgrimage.³⁴

**INSTALLATION
AND ASSEMBLY:
SEEING AND
NOT SEEING**

An important area of focus concerns the way in which the badges were incorporated, because that varied significantly from Garden to Garden. In three of the Mechelen Enclosed Gardens

(G1, G3, G6), the badges have been fastened so that they are in plain sight. Using needle and thread, they have been affixed to the textile rolls in the geometric lattice placed over the backdrop to the cabinets (Ill. 124). This manifest installation allowed users to see the badge, to imagine the relevant shrine in their minds (or to recall it from memory), and to include the image within the spiritual and meditative visual narrative of the Enclosed Garden.

The *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2) provides an instance of a quite different type of installation and, moreover, one that opens up new avenues of interpretation. In this case, most of the badges have been brought together with a number of other objects and materials to form a sacred package. Their precise construction varies, but it usually involves a thin sheet of brass between two pieces of parchment, the uppermost of which bears a line of text that describes a relic (*cedula*); this is followed by the metal badge and, lastly, the relic itself or a pewter ornament (Ill. 126). The whole thing is secured using functional and decorative



Ill. 124
Pilgrim badge with the Virgin Mary enthroned with the Christ Child – Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn

Ill. 125
(pages 201–202)
Relic of St Bartholomew on a pilgrim badge – Garden with St Ursula



Handwritten red text on a white circular label, possibly a name or brand name, including the characters "O", "A", "L", "E", "S", "S", "A", "M", "A".



dit co
Wain
Mie
Wain
Wain



Ill. 126
 Relic of St Dorothy on
 a St Adrian badge –
 Garden with St Ursula

metallic thread, and glass beads or sequins. In other words, most of the badges in this particular Enclosed Garden served as the bearers of a relic; although the badge was visibly present, its image could not be seen. In this type of application, the image was subordinate to the object's apotropaic and fortune-bringing power. Something remarkable is revealed in the single instance where a badge can be gazed upon despite the presence of a relic; the image does not correspond to the relic. A badge of St Adrian from Geraardsbergen bears a splinter

from the bones of St Ursula's eleven thousand virgins. So long as the majority of the other badges remain obscured, it is difficult to determine whether this represents the original installation or whether it is the result of subsequent intervention.

The non-visible or 'blind' incorporation of the badges in the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2) was never previously remarked upon. This interpretation of the manner of their installation adds a further dimension to Andrea Pearson's recent theory, which identified the hospital sister on the

right-hand panel as the blind Maria Van den Putte. The side panels are said to have been produced at the behest of her parents, Jacob Van den Putte and Margaretha Svos, with their name saints depicted on them (see Ill. 67, p. 123). Pearson considers the Garden to be a visual expression of their care for and devotion to their blind daughter. It may have functioned as a form of social mediation in respect of the hospital sisters who took over responsibility for Maria's care, and simultaneously as a tactile devotional resource for Maria Van den Putte herself.⁵⁵ The unusual blind incorporation of the badges in this Garden leads to the premise that the parents – and not the hospital sisters, as was so long assumed – commissioned not only the side panels but also this entire Enclosed Garden. This hypothesis means that the wrapped badges must have been present at the time of the Garden's actual completion.

The possible blindness of the first user provides food for thought concerning how this Enclosed Garden was used. Barbara Baert has already published on the haptic and tactile aspect of these devotional objects, where sight, scent, sound and touch all had roles to play.⁵⁶ Cultural-historical research into metal badges reveals that physical contact with them (touching and wearing them) was meaningful. Badges derived their intrinsic power from the cult image or from the relic corresponding to the image (relics with which they had sometimes been in actual contact).⁵⁷ Consequently, there were genuine opportunities for physical meditative contact with badges while collecting them, while mounting them and perhaps even while going on spiritual perambulations through the paradisiacal Garden itself.⁵⁸ Maria Van den Putte's large hands in relation to her small head, as previously remarked upon by Pearson, do not constitute an argument in favour of physical contact. In point of fact, this should be explained as a result of the painter having altered the hands in relation to the underdrawing and as a result of a restoration of the original paint layer (see Ill. 70, p. 125). However, the way in which badges, relics and other devotional items were customarily handled does indeed constitute an argument for emphasising the importance of touch. Nevertheless, unlike some late medieval manuscripts and devotional objects, the badges in the Enclosed Gardens do not bear any traces of intensive use.

IN CONCLUSION

To fully grasp the Enclosed Gardens as spiritual, meditative and devotional objects, it is essential to

take an integrated approach to their component parts – leaving aside the materials from which they were made. Just like the sculptures and side panels, as well as the plants, animals and other devotional objects, the small metal badges make their own contribution to the greater whole.

Analysis of the badges reveals that their function varies from Garden to Garden. At times the badges were fully and intrinsically integrated within the iconological scheme, which allowed them to serve as a tool for use in thematic contemplation. At other times it was not the badges' imagery that played a role but rather their intrinsic function as the bearers of holy power. In other cases, it was in fact remembrance of physical pilgrimage that had been important to the pilgrim and/or user who collected the badges. For other users, the virtual or spiritual pilgrimage that, through their meditation, took in all the pilgrimage sites represented along the way, would have supplied them with plenty of material to contemplate. Whatever the case, it can be said with regard to all the Enclosed Gardens that the inclusion of badges was underpinned by the commissioner or user's personal and individual motivation. The variations in terms of quantity, material and modes of attachment from cabinet to cabinet also attest to this.

This means in terms of the badges that the assumed serial production of Enclosed Gardens at the Mechelen Hospital of Our Lady does not stand up to close scrutiny. In order to reject wholesale the paradigm of the Mechelen hospital as having been *the* production centre of Enclosed Gardens, it will be necessary, of course, to engage in far broader comparative research with a focus on materials, iconology, history and conservation. The badges do not provide any kind of definitive answer in respect of putative commissioners and early use by the Mechelen hospital sisters. Women and men in and outside the convent could all have been pilgrims or collectors. However, it can be accepted without any doubt that the Mechelen Augustinian nuns' hospital proved to be a caring repository for these delicate Enclosed Gardens.

ILL. 127

Pilgrim badge with
St Anne from Düren –
Garden with St Anne

TABLE SUMMARISING THE METAL BADGES FOUND IN THE MECHELEN ENCLOSED GARDENS

Badges (place of origin) ⁵⁹	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	G6	G7	Total
Annunciation	8							8
Christ Child with reference to the Cross and <i>arma Christi</i>	1							1
Crucified Christ with two Angels			1					1
St Adrian (Geraardsbergen)		2	1					3
St Anne (Düren)						1		1
St Anthony the Abbot (Bailleul)	1							1
St Barbara	1							1
St Cornelius (Kornelimünster)		1						1
St Cornelius (Diegem)		1						1
St Dymphna (Geel)						1		1
St Job (Wezemaal)		1	1					2
St Quentin (Leuven)			1					1
St Nicholas (Saint-Nicolas-de-Port)		1						1
St Sebastian	1		2					3
Royal lovers [edge lettering 'PRENES: ENGRE']	1							1
Virgin with Child (Halle)		1	2					3
Virgin with Child (Mesen)						1		1
Virgin with Child (unknown)	1	1						2
Reliquary of Virgin Mary (Wavre)				1				1
Standing saint		3						3
Vera icon		1						1
Depiction not visible		5						5
Depiction unidentifiable (corrosion)		1						1
Total	14	18	8	1	0	3	0	44





III. 128

Gilded medallion with
a *noli me tangere* –
Garden with St Ursula

1 For example: W.H. James Weale, *Catalogue des objets d'art religieux du Moyen Age, de la Renaissance et des temps modernes, exposés à l'Hôtel Liedekerke à Malines* (Brussels: C. Lelong, 1864), 15-18 (cat. 147-153); *Exposition des anciens métiers d'art malinois, d'art religieux de la province d'Anvers et de folklore local* (Mechelen: Dierickx-Beke, 1911), 16-18, 25-28 (cat. 78-86); *Aspecten van de Laatgotiek in Brabant* (Leuven: Interleuven, 1971), 264-266 (cat. MS/8), 451-462 (cat. MB/36-43); Heidi De Nijn, ed., *Het Mechelse meubel 1500-2000. Van houtsnijwerk tot design*, vol. 3, *Mechels houtsnijwerk in de eeuw van keizer Karel*, exhib. cat. (Mechelen: Stedelijke Musea, 2000), 123-131 (cat. 3-9) (however, the badges are discussed in relation to the Enclosed Garden from Balen).

2 Marjolijn Kruij, 'Het Besloten Hofje: een spirituele pelgrimage,' in *Geloof & geluk. Sieraad en devotie in middeleeuws Vlaanderen*, Jos Koldewey, ed., exhib. cat. (Arnhem: Terra Lannoo, 2006), 233-234.

3 Herentals, Begijnhofmuseum, inv. B 2.12; Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp, inv. 5094; Kalkar, St Nicholas' Church, predellas of the Altarpiece of the Holy Trinity and St John Altarpiece; Arras, Musée des Beaux-Arts, inv. 945.3.45. The Enclosed Garden at the Sint-Dimpnakerk in Geel includes one St Servatius badge.

4 Interestingly enough, the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6) does not contain any relics and the *Enclosed Garden with a Crucified Christ* (G5) has no Agnus Dei.

5 It is difficult to give a date for the overpainting of the side panels of the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6), but it is thought to have been done no more than 100 years later, at most. Whether the stewards and nuns on the side panels of the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3) were incorporated from the outset or subsequently (note the conspicuous overpainting of the hinges) is a matter to be resolved by future investigations within the context of the ArtGarden Research Project. I should like to thank Hilde Weisenborn and Joke Vandermeersch for this information.

6 Andrea Pearson, 'Sensory Piety as Social Intervention in a Mechelen *Besloten*

Hofje,' *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 9, no. 2 (summer 2017): especially 5, 7 and 21. See also: Weale, *Catalogue des objets*, 15 (cat. 147).

7 With regard to Margaret of Austria, see: Dagmar Eichberger, *Leben mit Kunst. Wirken durch Kunst. Sammelwesen und Hofkunst unter Margarete von Österreich, Regentin der Niederlande* (Turnhout: Brepolis, 2002), 220, 398-399. With regard to the reliquary of Albert of Brandenburg, see: Philipp Maria Halm and Rudolf Berliner, *Das Hallesche Heiltum* (*Man. Aschaffenb. 14*), (Berlin: Deutscher Verein für Kunstwissenschaft, 1931), 1-15 (cat. 15-19, 24).

8 Kruij, 'In beeld gebracht,' especially 2-4, 69-77.

9 Hendrik Jan E. van Beuningen and A.M. (Jos) Koldewey, eds., *Heilig en profaan*, vol. 1, *1000 laatmiddeleeuwse insignes uit de collectie H.J.E. van Beuningen* (Cothen: Stichting Middeleeuwse Religieuze en Profane Insignes, 1993), 11-15 (Koldewey); Koldewey, ed., *Geloof & geluk*.

10 Kurt Köster, 'Kollektionen metallener Wallfahrts-Devotionalien und kleiner Andachtsbilder, eingenäht in spätmittelalterliche Gebetbuch-Handschriften,' in *Erleneses aus der Welt des Buches. Gedanken, Betrachtungen, Forschungen*, Bertram Haller, ed. (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1979), 77-130; Van Beuningen and Koldewey, eds., *Heilig en profaan*, vol. 1, 46-48 (Koldewey); Hendrik Jan E. van Beuningen, A.M. (Jos) Koldewey and Dory Kicken, eds., *Heilig en profaan*, vol. 2, *1200 laatmiddeleeuwse insignes uit openbare en particuliere collecties* (Cothen: Stichting Middeleeuwse Religieuze en Profane Insignes, 2001), 112-127 (Elly van Loon-Van de Moosdijk), 128-136 (Jörg Poettgen), 137-145 (J.E. Wustenhoff); Elly van Loon-Van de Moosdijk, 'Goet ende wael gheraect'. *Versieringsmotieven op luid- en spekklokken uit de Middeleeuwen en Renaissance in het hertogdom Brabant (1300 tot 1559)*, (Nijmegen: Nijmegen University Press, 2004), 85-111; Koldewey, ed., *Geloof & geluk*, 227-244; Hanneke van Asperen, *Pelgrimstekens op perkament. Originele en nageschilderde bedevaartssouvenirs in religieuze boeken (c. 1450 – c. 1530)*, (Nijmegen: Stichting Nijmeegse Kunsthistorische Studies, 2009).

11 Online database of Radboud University Nijmegen with 20,000 badges and ampullae: www.kunera.nl (last consulted December 2017).

12 Van Beuningen and Koldewey, eds., *Heilig en profaan*, vol. 1, 16-25 (Van Beuningen); Koldewey, ed., *Geloof & geluk*, chap. 9.

13 The Kunera database does not contain any equivalent or related example (see note 11).

14 Kunera, object nos. 02741, 03184, (03185) (last consulted 4 December 2017).

15 Camille Poupeye, 'Les jardins clos et leurs rapports avec la sculpture malinoise,' *Bulletin du Cercle archéologique, littéraire et artistique de Malines*, no. 22 (1912): 56-59; *Aspecten van de Laatgotiek*, 451-454 (cat. MB/36); Paul Vandebroeck, ed., *Hooglied. De beeldwereld van religieuze vrouwen in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden, vanaf de 13de eeuw*, exhib. cat. (Brussels-Ghent: Paleis voor Schone Kunsten/Snoeck-Ducaju, 1994), 93-97; Barbara Baert, 'Echoes of Liminal Spaces. Revisiting the Late Mediaeval "Enclosed Gardens" of the Low Countries (A Hermeneutical Contribution to Chthonic Artistic Expression),' *Jaarboek Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen* (2012): 12-15.

16 Especially: Poupeye, 'Les jardins clos', 57.

17 See: Van Beuningen and Koldewey, eds., *Heilig en profaan*, vol. 1, 202; Hendrik Jan E. van Beuningen, A.M. (Jos) Koldewey, Dory Kicken and Hanneke van Asperen, eds., *Heilig en profaan*, vol. 3: *1300 laatmiddeleeuwse insignes uit openbare en particuliere collecties* (Cothen: Stichting Middeleeuwse Religieuze en Profane Insignes, 2012), 229.

18 Christine de Pisan, *Œuvres poétiques*, 1886-96, vol. 1, 81.

19 For example: ivory mirror case, c. 1410, Baltimore, The Walters Art Museum, inv. 71.107; ivory comb, 16th century, London, British Museum, inv. SLMisc.565. 'Presentation miniature' in manuscript *The Erle of Tolous*, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 45, fol.2r, early 16th century. Regarding the manuscript, see: Carol M. Meale, "'Prenes: Engre": An Early Sixteenth-Century Presentation Copy of *The Erle of Tolous*,' in *Romance Reading on The Book: Essays on Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills*,

Jennifer Fellows et al., eds. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), 221-236.

20 Edge lettering inspired by: Phil. 2:8-10. See also: Poupeye, 'Les jardins clos', 83 (no. 2).

21 *Van de Calvarieberg, waar onze Heer de bittere dood stierf* ('From Golgotha, where Our Lord met his bitter death').

22 *Christus is voor ons gestorven in grote nood, op de Calvarieberg, de allerbitterste dood: in Jezus' wonden is onze genade en de verlossing van onze misdaden en zonden*. Old sources give a different spelling, e.g. Weale, *Catalogue des objets*, 16; *Anciens métiers*, 26; Poupeye, 'Les jardins clos', 84.

23 Saint badges do exist that correspond iconologically to another component, such as the Anne badge and the sculpture of St Anne with Virgin and Child in the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6), but these commonalities are incidental.

24 See: Van Beuningen and Koldewey, eds., *Heilig en profaan*, vol. 1, 79-83 (H.J.E. Van Beuningen), 168-170 (nos. 233-243); Van Beuningen, Koldewey and Kicken, eds., *Heilig en profaan*, vol. 2, 269-270 (nos. 1147-1148); Van Beuningen, Koldewey, Kicken and Van Asperen, eds., *Heilig en profaan*, vol. 3, 134-135 (nos. 2365-2370).

25 Van Asperen, *Pelgrimstekens op perkament*, 65-69.

26 Rudy called the terminology into question in relation to Christological badges: Kathryn M. Rudy, 'Sewing the Body of Christ: Eucharist Wafer Souvenirs Stitched into Fifteenth-Century Manuscripts, primarily in the Netherlands,' *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 8, no. 1 (winter 2016): 1-9. doi:10.5092/jhna.2016.8.1.1.

27 Van Asperen, *Pelgrimstekens op perkament*, 79-82, 104.

28 I would like to express my thanks to Hanneke van Asperen for her help in identifying various places of origin.

29 Kunera, object nos. 08839r, 08950r, 08994v (last consulted 14 December 2017). Form and image differ, but all are attributed to Diegem.

30 Kruij, 'Het Besloten Hofje,' 233-234.

31 Van Asperen, *Pelgrimstekens op perkament*, 102-107. Van Asperen does mention in footnote 453 on p. 148 a lost piece at the Bijloekemuseum in Ghent

(inv. 1043) that originated from a convent and contains badges, relics and the prologue to the Gospel corresponding to the Gardens.

32 Archive of the Archdiocese of Mechelen-Brussels in Mechelen (AAM), Gasthuiszusters Mechelen 1, Statuten en ordonnances, 1509.

33 Mechelen City Archives (SAM), OCMW 8763, Onze Lieve Vrouwgasthuis te Mechelen, 206. See: Pearson, 'Sensory Piety', 34 (no. 85).

34 Kathryn M. Rudy, *Virtual Pilgrimages in the Convent. Imagining Jerusalem in the Late Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 112-118.

35 Pearson, 'Sensory Piety', 19-22.

36 Baert, 'Echoes', 9-46; Barbara Baert, 'An Odour, a Taste, a Touch. Impossible to Describe. Noli me tangere and the Senses,' in *Religion and the Senses in Early Modern Europe*. Intersections. Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture, 26, Wietse de Boer and Christine Göttler, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 111-151.

37 Koldewey, *Geloof & geluk*, 15, 42, 165, 199, 202, 227, 247; Van Asperen, *Pelgrimstekens op perkament*, 142-151.

38 Regarding the meditative touching of manuscripts, see: Van Asperen, *Pelgrimstekens op perkament*, 178, 247, 346; Kathryn M. Rudy, 'Dirty Books: Quantifying Patterns of Use in Medieval Manuscripts Using a Densitometer,' *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art*, 2, no. 1-2 (summer 2010). doi:10.5092/jhna.2010.2.1.1.

39 Where applicable. Some images are so general in nature that the badge cannot be attributed to any specific site of pilgrimage.

Ill. 129
Brass sequins of different shapes – Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den

Ill. 130
(pages 212–213)
Detail of flowers and *paperolles* – Garden with St Ursula









The *Papier-* *pressé* Medallion Depicting the Holy Hunt

HANNAH ITERBEKE

III. 131

Polychrome medallion
in *papier-pressé*
depicting the Holy
Hunt (Madonna with
the Unicorn) – Garden
with St Anne

In the middle of the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6), a colourful medallion appears amid a delicate web of silk flowers. As in the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1), the seal represents a Holy Hunt, a Marian allegory that enjoyed some popularity in the pre-Tridentine Hospital of Our Lady.

The seal bears several inscriptions that elucidate each single element depicted on the seal. This conventional set of symbols also appears in the aforementioned Enclosed Garden of the same subject (G1): the conflation of the Mystic Hunt with St Mary and the Annunciation (*Ave [Maria] gracia plena d[omi]n[u]s tecum*), the sealed fountain of the Song of Songs (*fons signatus*), the rod of Aaron (*virga aaro[nis]*), the fleece of Gideon (*vellus iedionis*), the Golden Pot (*urna aurea*), and the burning bush of Moses (*rub[u]s moisi*).

The precise origin of the seal is unknown, but the medium of *papier-pressé* does reveal some clues about its production process. These kinds of medallions were made by pressing pipe clay, dough, wax or — in this case — wet paper pulp into a mould and baking it or letting it dry out. Once hardened, the substance was occasionally painted, as in the case of the seal under consideration here.

Several moulds in different materials but of the same composition and dimensions have come down to us. The Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg, for instance, holds a lead mould of the Holy Hunt (inv. HG2 138), and there is a pipe-clay version in the Swiss National Museum in Zurich (inv. LM 6767). Fragments of the same cast have also been discovered in the Landesmuseum in Mainz and in the Musée National d'Histoire et d'Art in Luxembourg. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the seal from the Enclosed Garden originated from a similar example.

Two other seals can be found in the *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4). One depicts Christ in profile, while the other shows a *Schmerzenskind* or Christ Child carrying the instruments of the Passion. Both these seals were made in pipe clay and subsequently painted.

It was assumed that these kinds of medallions in pipe clay, *papier-pressé* or edible dough were made by religious women. Nevertheless, there is no primary source that supports the hypothesis that the sisters of the Hospital of Our Lady did engage in the making of these artefacts. Within the context of Mechelen, however, the Waghevens family of bell makers seems to have had direct access to the same designs. All three medallion designs were cast into church bells during the first half of the sixteenth century. The seal representing the Holy Hunt, for instance, was integrated into a church bell (named Gabriel) that Joris Waghevens produced for the church of Pulderbosch in 1518. The medallion featuring Christ's profile, identical to the one in the *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4), was cast on the same bell. Whether the Waghevens family were also responsible for the seals in the Enclosed Gardens remains an unanswered question.



CONSERVATION

As historical mixed-media objects comprising numerous materials and techniques, the complexity of the Gardens demanded a creative and multidisciplinary approach from a team of curators and conservation scientists. The preservation of the historical stratification was vital. It took four years (2014-18) to research and treat the seven Enclosed Gardens of Mechelen.

III. 132

Reverse side of the peat base wrapped in linen and silk; reverse side of the flowers and plants. Owing to its having suffered less damage from light, the silk seen here is closer to its original colour – Garden with a Crucified Christ

The Conservation and Restoration of the Seven Mechelen Enclosed Gardens (2014–18)

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INTRODUCTION

Without any doubt, the conservation and restoration of the Mechelen Enclosed Gardens has been one of the most challenging and complex projects of this type in the Low Countries in the past decade.¹ These extraordinary sixteenth-century ensembles with their wide variety of artefacts and fragile condition required the committed engagement of an exceptional team of conservation experts. It took all of four years to give the seven Enclosed Gardens the treatment they needed. Their complex composition, employing numerous materials and techniques, demanded a multidisciplinary approach. In 2014, specialist conservator-restorers ranging across eight disciplines (woodwork, polychromy, panel painting, parchment and paper, metal, wax, glass and textiles) drafted a preliminary analysis, attaching their proposals for subsequent treatment. Previous conservation treatments for Enclosed Gardens in Balen (near Antwerp), Arras (northern France) and Kalkar and

Bentlage (Rhineland, Germany) were studied comprehensively.² The actual conservation was paired with scientific research into the Mechelen Enclosed Gardens. The three largest Gardens were conserved during the first phase from 2014 to 2016: the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1), the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2) and the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6).³ The second treatment phase followed in 2017-18 and involved the four other Gardens: the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3), the *Enclosed Garden with a Crucified Christ* (G5) and the *Enclosed Garden with a Madonna* (G7). The *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4) is to be completed in summer 2019.

The conservation work shed light on new information that has enriched, augmented and supplemented the historical, stylistic and technical study of the Enclosed Gardens. The imposing nature of the largest cabinets, their three-dimensionality and the hundreds of artefacts created from a mixture of organic and inorganic materials presented a particular challenge. The Gardens are filled with

plants and animals made from silk, parchment, cherry stones and metallic thread, with wax Agnus Dei images, metal pilgrim badges, miniatures and inscriptions on parchment, prints on paper, beads made from different types of glass, coral, amber and bone, as well as rock crystal, with reliquary bones and polychromed statuettes (also known as the *poupées de Malines*).

Handling, natural ageing (patina) and soiling had clearly left their mark over a period of 500 years (Ill. 133). Here and there, the ravages of time had caused irreparable damage. Organic materials, such as silk, were on the verge of crumbling into dust or falling apart; inorganic elements, including metal supporting structures, had become distorted and/or corroded, and numerous artefacts had broken loose from their attachments.

The Gardens had required maintenance from the beginning of the sixteenth century. The nuns who provided a home to these pieces were regularly engaged in their 'refurbishment'. Not a single one of the Gardens remains in its original state; all, to a greater or lesser extent, have undergone some form of intervention and alteration. The majority have been dismantled either wholly or in part on at least one occasion. In some cases, the paper used to decorate the innerwall has been replaced – resulting in certain artefacts having changed places – and some cabinets were overpainted. Protective glass was installed once the extent of the Gardens' fragility was realised in the nineteenth century. Although traces of maintenance are evident in each cabinet, the seven Enclosed Gardens have remained preserved as fully fledged entities. This is largely thanks to their having been kept within the walls of the Augustinian convent. Many other Enclosed Gardens have been lost or destroyed. It is this that makes the Mechelen collection unique and, simultaneously, has made the challenge facing the researchers and conservator-restorers all the greater.

In dialogue with art historians and the custodians of the Enclosed Gardens, the aim was to take the greatest possible care in preserving the historic stratification. Dust and impurities had to be removed for the sake of long-term conservation and to enhance the 'legibility'. Care was taken to preserve material evidence not posing any immediate threat, such as missing or repositioned fragments, insect damage, distortion and former interventions that referred to the objects' history. For example,

some frames and cabinets have several finishing coats; in such cases the most recently applied layer was conserved. In other words, none of the layers was removed. However, mixed-media objects with a history dating back 500 years do not lend themselves easily to a straightforward conservation plan. Certain components have been irretrievably lost, some have been replaced and others have become so irreparably degraded as to necessitate a logical approach bearing in mind the options, restrictions and compatibility of techniques available for each material or each specific technique. This is how a cautious, protective approach to treatment was developed for the Gardens.

Ill. 133

Moses prior to conservation treatment, entirely dulled by the dust that became embedded in a layer of wax from a previous restoration – Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn





Ill. 134

**TREATMENT
PROTOCOLS AND
DOCUMENTATION**

The conservator-restorers set the bar high when designing and carefully implementing a protocol for conservation. The approach towards each

Enclosed Garden was continually adjusted during treatment in order to reach the most harmonious possible result. A comprehensive inventory was compiled to gain a perspective on the condition of the artefacts and to continue clearing a path through the maze of tiny objects making up each of the Enclosed Gardens (Ill. 134).

The documentation consists of high-resolution photographs of the whole ensemble and of particular areas and fields within each Enclosed Garden, making use of targeted lighting, soft lighting and UV fluorescence.⁴ The technical imaging involved X-rays of the cabinets and infrared reflectography (IRR) of the panels. Images were also taken of specific objects with the help of photometric stereo technology (Portable Light Dome, KU Leuven) in order to better understand their three-dimensionality (Ill. 136).

The conservation project required an inventory system applicable to each object. The survey photographs of the cabinets were divided into 'fields' with a separate code given to each field to enable expeditious matching of the artefacts to a location. Next, the hundreds of objects were divided into ten groups, with a separate name and colour given to each group. Each object was given an inventory number consisting of the 'object group', a secondary number and its specific location in the cabinet. All this data was incorporated into an MS-Excel spreadsheet. This information was supplemented with detailed photographs and with drawings on separate transparent layer to pinpoint the exact position of each artefact. Attachment methods were also described with regard to components taken out of the cabinet; the location coordinates were added to the digital file and recorded on a separate sheet of transparent foil. These temporarily removed items were also photographed individually, both before and after treatment. Furnished with their inventory number, they were temporarily stored in special pH-neutral compartmentalised boxes (Ill. 135).

Only the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) was dismantled completely. In most



Ill. 135

Ill. 134

Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn prior to dismantling: inventory of the artefacts on the peat base covered in relatively recent paper

Ill. 135

Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn during the dismantling operation. Each component was accompanied by its inventory number and stored in separate, pH-neutral boxes

Ill. 136

Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den: X-ray photograph of the filled cabinet, which was used when the Garden was partially dismantled and which helped bring to light the applied brocade concealed behind the inner cabinet





ILL. 137

Peat base wrapped in linen and silk after partial dismantling and prior to cleaning. The coloured pins refer to the original locations of temporarily removed vegetation – Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den





ILL. 138

Pilgrim badge that lay on the peat base of the Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn, the attachment point for which was relocated in the *paperolle* lattice

of the other Gardens it was only the gate with its fencing and base that were removed temporarily. Once the treatment for an Enclosed Garden had been completed, survey and detailed photographs of that Garden were again taken (Ill. 138).

THE OAK CABINETS

The seven Enclosed Garden cabinets differ markedly from Brabant retables of the same period. This is because they are not compartmentalised and do not display any interior architectural elements, apart from the symbolic gate that, as a rule, closes off the garden. The Mechelen Enclosed Gardens generally consist of simple rectangular cabinets with panels that form shutters, and are made from oak, probably Baltic in origin.⁵ The marks left by the woodcutters can still be discerned on the back of the cabinets containing the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) and the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2). The cabinet containing the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6) bears the Mechelen mark on the exterior of its left-hand side, with the three pales in reference to the city's coat of arms. Nevertheless, there is variation in terms of

The seven Enclosed Garden cabinets differ markedly from Brabant retables of the same period. This is because they are not

the Enclosed Gardens' construction. For example, Garden 2 and Garden 6 have a more eye-catching format: specifically, a front with a rounded-off ogee arch that corresponds closely to Antwerp retables. The sides have been assembled by means of mortise and tenon joints using dowel rods. They create the outer walls of the cabinet and constitute the first structural phase of construction. The back of each cabinet consists of thin but quite wide tongue and groove panels (between two and five in number, depending on the width of the cabinet). These panels have been made from quartersawn oak, somewhat coarsely finished and almost always incorporated vertically – only in the case of the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3) were they arranged horizontally. The back of the cabinet is attached to the edges of its side walls using wrought-iron nails. The cabinet is supported by a wooden base sometimes decorated with fretwork and serving as a sort of predella. Furthermore, the rectangular cabinets have a fretwork cornice, at times surmounted by ornamental pinnacles.

Each cabinet has an additional internal wall that covers the entire back of the interior and sometimes part of the uppermost cross beam (the 'ceiling'); its purpose is to support the entire garden construction with its vegetation, relics and badges.⁶ This second back panel is composed of several quite thin sheets of oak and is usually covered with decorative paper. Originally, the ornaments were attached by metallic thread running through small holes in the rear wall and joined together at the back.⁷ The cabinets display no features that would indicate series production or a standardised construction system at a specific workshop. As noted previously, it is only the cabinet containing the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6) that bears the Mechelen mark with the three pales that refer to the city's coat of arms.

The beautiful *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4) is an exception to the usual manner of assembly: it possesses an inner and outer cabinet. The 5-mm-thick oak sheets used for the interior cabinet are painted black. The back of the inner cabinet is made from three planed planks held together by glued tongue and groove joints; two side walls and a ceiling plank are nailed into position against this. This Enclosed Garden is unusual, because the outer cabinet (concealed by the inner

cabinet) has walls decorated with pressed brocade. This is an imitation of red velvet in relief using a polychromy technique and is in part composed of tinfoil and beeswax. The side walls of the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3) was (originally) decorated in red arabesques on a white background, using a somewhat similar technique to that used for the pressed brocade in the *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4). In the other Gardens, the side walls have been painted, usually in a monochrome blue strewn with golden stars.⁸

The *Enclosed Gardens with St Ursula* (G2), with *Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4) and with *the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6) contain polychrome mouldings that round off the cabinets and the inner side panels, lending unity to the whole piece. Several layers of overpainting have been discovered in respect of the polychrome treatment given to the mouldings, pedestals and the cornices.⁹ In the case of the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6), it is the most recent brown layer on the cabinet and the moulding that catches the eye. With the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3), the unity between cabinet and panels is achieved by means of the painted border around the painted portraits of the founders and their patron saints. That unity is less well defined in the cabinets containing the *Enclosed Gardens with a Crucified Christ* (G5) and with *the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6). It is unclear whether they were conceived as a whole – i.e. with panels and cornice and/or pedestal. It is possible that the shutter panels of the *Enclosed Garden with a Madonna* (G7) are made from re-used materials.¹⁰ However, it is indisputable that the panels of the *Enclosed Garden with a Crucified Christ* (G5) have been adapted to fit the cabinet. The pedestal for this cabinet has more of a nineteenth-century appearance, which also raises issues concerning the originality of the cornice woodcarving. Polychromy has not been detected on either the pedestal or the cornice.

Given that robust oak was used in their construction, the majority of the cabinets have been spared the most serious types of insect damage. Only the back and a handful of other areas in the cabinets containing the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) and the underside of the base to the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3) show signs of attack by wood-boring insects and, as a result, severely weakened timber. During

conservation treatment, the wood was stabilised by injecting it with a synthetic resin. Cracks in the back of some of the cabinets were sealed using fish glue. Damaged areas or missing sections from the cabinets' cornices or pedestals were reconstructed using malleable wood filler.

The cabinet of the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) is the only one to have been completely dismantled for the purposes of conservation treatment. The many sculptures pegged to the cabinet's rear wall during a previous intervention were temporarily drilled free and, afterwards, reattached using new oak dowel rods. The same approach was taken in respect of the figurines in the *Enclosed Gardens with a Calvary scene* (G3) and with *Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4). The sculptures in the other Gardens were similarly fixed in place, either by means of a dowel rod passing through the innermost cabinet's rear wall and then (often at the time of more recent interventions)¹¹ through the outer rear wall, or by means of a dowel rod beneath the figurine that fitted into a hole in the green base of the Garden. Some objects were simply set down separately on this base. At times, bamboo pegs were also used as a new means of attachment. This material, which comes in many variants and is as flexible as it is durable, was ideal for this type of application. What is more, it serves as an indicator of where recent additions have been made.

The existing (and not always original) polychrome paint was not removed from any part of the cabinets. Minor retouching was performed where necessary, especially around the profile where the protective glass had formerly been placed.

**CONSERVATION
OF THE PAINTED
PANELS**

As already mentioned above, with the exception of the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1), all the Gardens have two painted side panels. These shutters, whether furnished with a frame or otherwise, display paintings in oils on the inner side. Apart from the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3), in which figures are painted on both sides of the panels, the outer side features either natural wood or a monochrome application of paint. The inner surface of the panels was smoothed for

figurative painting, while the outer side retains traces of the woodworking process. The panels, which were first framed and only afterwards painted, were made specifically for 'their' Garden. The polychrome applications on the frames correspond to those used for the cabinet.

The shutters of the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3) were not painted figuratively in the first instance. They were produced as ordinary shutters and painted a monochrome red, with the surface of the timber still in a relatively coarse state, betraying visible traces of planing, axe blows and pitting. The panels were not set in a frame and the wrought-iron hinges were nailed straight into the panels. The vermilion coloured paint was hurriedly applied with broad brushstrokes over a sparse layer of primer, leaving the coarse grain of the oak and the traces of woodworking clearly visible. We do not know how long the shutters remained in that condition. One notable detail: later, when it was decided to add a front-and-back figuration, nobody took the trouble to make the surface any smoother by applying a new layer of (white) primer. The underdrawing and the painting were applied directly on to the vermilion red – even extending across the hinges. It had clearly not been the intention to 'use' red as an undertone, because the figurative paint layer was quite densely applied on top of it, and in areas with gold leaf (haloes and attributes), an ochre-coloured layer was first used. The reason for the present-day visibility of the red paint is that the figurative painting has become more transparent in places as a result of ageing. The underlying red is now clearly visible, particularly in the lacunae and in those areas exhibiting wear and tear.

As for the two smallest Enclosed Gardens – the *Enclosed Garden with a Madonna* (G7) and the *Enclosed Garden with a Crucified Christ* (G5) – the panels are composed in each case of one oak plank without a frame. Only the inner side of the panels was painted. The natural oak is visible when the shutters are closed; the profiled battens fitted around them create the visual impression of a frame. In the *Enclosed Garden with a Crucified Christ* (G5), small pre-existing paintings were used for the shutters, the format of which was adjusted; the panels were widened and the landscape on both panels extended to their edges.

Just as the composition of the side panels differs in each of the Enclosed Gardens, there are also differences concerning the type and extent of damage or even the restoration history. For example, the panels of the two largest Gardens – the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2) and the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6) – are exceptionally well preserved. The wooden supports as well as the pictorial layer display little damage and previous restoration work is limited; however, the panel exteriors have been overpainted at some time or another. The panels of the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3) are also relatively well preserved, although the paintwork does exhibit more signs of deterioration. This Garden's most noticeable intervention from the past is that the uniformly painted edges, which create an illusory frame around the picture, were largely overpainted. However, it is easy to make a link with the other Gardens where the frames were repeatedly overpainted, usually in conjunction with the cabinets. The panels of the smaller Gardens – the *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4), the *Enclosed Garden with a Crucified Christ* (G5) and the *Enclosed Garden with a Madonna* (G7) – clearly exhibit greater damage and were also subjected to restoration work of a more rigorous nature. On occasion, large sections of the figures and background were overpainted. For example, owing to repeated overpainting, the panels of the *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4) were initially evaluated as being of relatively low quality. The conservation treatment, which consisted of removing the varnish and earlier retouching and overpainting, made it possible to see the quality of these small panels once again. Cleaning led to the reappearance of a number of details that had been lost or seriously altered in form as a result of excessive retouching. One good example of this is St Peter's book; following conservation treatment, it 'once again' lies open.

Although each of the side panels was approached on a case-by-case basis, their treatment always followed the same methodology: glueing any cracks in the wooden supports, fixing any blistering and reattaching loose flakes of paint from the pictorial layer. Afterwards, action was taken to improve the aesthetic quality of the works, with cleaning being an important component in each case. Removing yellowed layers of varnish

intensified the strength and clarity of colours. Consequently, this restored the balance between the cool and warm tones that the artists must have had in mind. The 'blotchy' appearance of the paintings was eradicated owing to the removal of old discoloured retouching and overpainting. After cleaning, we proceeded to reintegrate the damaged areas in each of the panels by filling in the lacunae, retouching the damage and applying a final coat of varnish.

**CONSERVATION
OF THE MECHELEN
STATUETTES**

The seven Enclosed Gardens house between one and, at times, in excess of twenty sculptures or objects made of walnut or, exceptionally, alabaster.

Most of the figurines (also known as the *poupées de Malines*, or Mechelen 'dolls'), all of extraordinary quality, are in very good condition and display their original polychromy. They show few traces of overpainting. Smaller components, such as angel

wings, swords or arrows, have been added separately in some cases. Marks left by clamps and chisels on the top and underside of these items provide evidence that the figurines were cut on a workbench. Although all sculptures bear testament to superior craftsmanship, it is notably only on the (non-polychrome) reverse of the figurines in the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) that we see the symbol used by the Mechelen woodcarvers: the three pales from the Mechelen coat of arms (Ill. 141). This mark was cold- or hot-pressed using an iron to produce three or four vertical parallel lines. It was placed by the Guild of St Luke as a guarantee of the wood's quality.

The statuettes have a polychrome front; the reverse has been left unfinished or else a primer has been partially applied. The crosses, bases and clothing display highly lustrous water gilding applied on a layer of red bole; the gold leaf was polished using a piece of agate. By way of contrast, a form of matt gilding using mixtion¹² was applied to other parts, such as the hair and the hems of the garments. The flesh tones used for the



ILL. 139
Careful retouching of the flesh tones of St Elisabeth's face – Garden with St Ursula

ILL. 140
(pages 228–229)
Flowers from the Garden with a Calvary and the Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den, made of brass wire, parchment, silk floss, glass beads, freshwater pearls, bone, coral, metal sequins, (gold and silver) metallic gut thread and polychrome wood







III. 141

Madonna with the unicorn following conservation (front and back), and detail showing the Mechelen woodcarvers' mark (the three pales in the city coat of arms) – Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn



Mechelen statuettes are usually subtle and pinkish; the cheeks of the female figures have been accentuated using a slightly brighter pink, and the lips are bright red. Most of the eyes have brown irises with black pupils; the eyebrows were applied using brown paint. Various techniques were employed for the decoration, including painted geometric patterns, templates, sgraffito and pressed brocade.¹³ All this was enhanced using decorative elements made from metal and glass – elements also employed when decorating the crucifix in several Enclosed Gardens.

The mark of the *stoffeerder* (the craftsman applying the polychromy is called a *polychromeur* in French), as found on several statuettes, confirms the quality of the work. Of the seven Enclosed Gardens, there are only two – the *Enclosed Garden with*

a *Crucified Christ* (G5) and the *Enclosed Garden with a Madonna* (G7) – in which no such marks have been discovered, either on the wood or on the decoration. It is the case that Mechelen figurines underwent a two-fold inspection: at the start of the production process the wood was evaluated and given the three-pales symbol if it met with approval. At the end of the process the polychromy was inspected in terms of the quality of the materials employed (pigments and metal foil). A die bearing the letter ‘M’ in gold leaf was pressed on to an item for the purpose of authenticating its quality. Two variants of that insignia have been found: the (most prevalent) Roman ‘M’, with double lines and more widely separated upright strokes, and the rather more Gothic ‘M’, rounded off at the top and with its upright strokes closer together at the base. The latter variant is present on two figurines in the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1), those of Mary Magdalene and St John the Evangelist. The pedestals of all three sculptures in the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2) bear the mark of the master polychrome artist Doermael. His mark, consisting of the inscription ‘DOERMAEL’ in capital letters, is surrounded by a punched rectangular frame in polychrome. The pedestal of the crucifix in the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3) bears the inscription ‘CORNIELIS’ in gilt lettering, referring to a *stoffeerder* who used this name as his signature. This added label is related with the decoration of pressed brocade used to adorn some mantles.¹⁴

As a whole, the Mechelen figurines have been quite well conserved. However, old exit holes made by wood-boring insects are visible in the wooden supports. This is particularly noticeable in the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1).¹⁵ The figurines appeared to be heavily soiled. A grey patina of accreted dust covered the polychrome; the dust had attached itself to the thick layer of wax-resin that had been applied in previous restoration efforts in an attempt to secure polychrome that had come loose from the wooden support.¹⁶ Moreover, the applied brocade to the figurines of Mary Magdalene and St John in the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) had become irreversibly damaged owing to the heat generated during an earlier use of wax-resin. In addition, the polychromy displayed blistering and lacunae, revealing the natural wood underneath. Where flesh tones were visible, particularly in the case of

the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6), the polychromy appeared to have suffered from excessively high temperatures that resulted in heat blistering.

For the most part, treatment entailed removing the heavily soiled layer of wax-resin on all the figurines by means of a heat spatula, cotton buds and a solvent. New blistering was fixed and old retouching removed. The largest lacunae in respect of flesh tones were softened through retouching, and slight retouching was also employed in places where the white undercoat was showing through – often at the edges of the lacunae. In most areas, retouching was addressed first, before filling in lacunae. This deliberate decision to take a prudent approach to working methods, ties in with the principle of conservation treatment whereby there was no hesitation about also displaying the fragile condition of many of the Enclosed Gardens’ objects.

**CONSERVATION
OF THE FLOWERS
AND THE TEXTILES**

A striking feature of each of the Gardens is the abundance of vegetation reproduced in silk, wire, parchment and glass (Ill. 142).

Alongside the statuettes, it is the flowers and plants that dominate the entire cabinet, which in four of the seven Gardens (G1, G2, G3 and G6) has been structured according to a fairly consistent approach:

1. A garden with grass, flowers, bushes and trees is displayed behind an enclosure with a gate. Depending on the size of the cabinet, the ground behind the enclosure consists of a sequence of blocks of peat kept in place with linen. The top layer, using a fairly loosely woven, subtly yellowish-green, plain-weave silk tissue, was intended to reinforce the sense of a garden.¹⁷ The linen and silk are usually fastened together with strong white or blue linen yarn. The *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6) is the only example where a sort of roll was used for the ground; this was filled with bran (the hard husks of cereal grains), although this meant a less stable substrate for the plants made out of silk, wire and parchment. There is also white linen around this roll, as well as a yellowish-green twill fabric. In all probability, this was the result of earlier restoration work.



ILL. 142

Detail of the seriously damaged flowers in the Garden with a Crucified Christ. The venerable silk fibres had broken apart and fallen off owing to tensile differences between the metal, the parchment and the silk

2. The lower half of the cabinet is divided into several areas by means of rolled structures measuring approximately 33-35 cm in height (usually paper, in exceptional cases parchment); these structures have been wrapped (sometimes double-wrapped) in plain-weave linen, and further decorated using elements such as wire, floral arrangements and badges. In the case of the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3), for example, we encounter a coarser, less whitened type of linen beneath the roll's finer – and whiter – outer layer of linen. It is possible that this was the result of a previous attempt at restoration.

3. The upper half of the cabinet is dominated on both the left and right by a diamond-shaped latticework. The lattice is made up of small rolls of paper, each one measuring approximately 5 cm to 7 or 8 cm in length and clad in pieces of fabric (and referred to as *paperolles*). The *paperolles* themselves were then decorated. Flowers were attached at the intersections of the rolls and in the diamond-shaped gaps formed by the lattice. The limited size of the *paperolles* made it possible to decorate them in all manner of residual materials. Consequently, numerous fabric structures have been found in a variety of colours, usually silk (with or without wire), sometimes also made of, or mixed with, linen and occasionally wool. Monochrome silk has been used in several shades of off-white, beige, green, yellow, pink, red, burgundy, black, bluish-grey and blue-green. The silk may be plain, rep and satin-woven, or else damask, and sometimes also occurs as velvet, which may or may not be cut or embossed, at times with gold loops and a golden underlay. These latter (extremely costly) weave structures are less prevalent, as are samite and lampas and brocade fabrics with figurative designs. Sometimes these fabrics have been incorporated so sparingly that they appear only as appliqué fragments and have not been used to wrap an entire item. On one solitary occasion – in the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3) – we also came across delicate embroidery using floss and gold thread. Similar fabrics were incorporated in the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1), the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2), the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3) and the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6).¹⁸ However, we can't be certain about whether they came from the same remnants.¹⁹

Cotton surrounding the *paperolles* would indicate later efforts at restoration – after all, this material would not yet have been available in the first half of the sixteenth century.²⁰

4. Most of the cabinets' 'ceilings' have been strewn with flowers, which usually appear in floral chains. Once again, the *Enclosed Gardens with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1), *with St Ursula* (G2), *with a Calvary scene* (G3) and *with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6) share close commonalities in that respect, with what are thought to be wild roses – white ones grouped to the left, red ones to the

right – referring respectively to the joys and sorrows of the Virgin Mary.

Hundreds of flowers have been counted in the three large Enclosed Gardens – including almost 200 in the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) and even more in the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2). They were subdivided into two groups for examination. The first group consists of stylised imitations of botanical species, which, in the lower sections of the aforementioned Gardens, refer almost literally to an early sixteenth-century garden and, in the upper sections, are more symbolic in their focus. The second group encompasses fantasy or heavenly flowers, which were literally meant to shine in a starring role. They are often placed on a golden disk and incorporate a lot of metal wire. The flowers and plants (and even assorted animals²¹) have been created by employing techniques in which yarn of loosely twined or untwined floss and membrane-metal threads is wound around a core of brass wire and/or parchment.²² Metal sequins and beads in all shapes and sizes enliven these creations. Bunches of grapes incorporate fine blue linen dyed with woad (indigo). This fabric was used to envelop a very small (wild?) cherry stone for each grape in a bunch; once so clad, the stones were then sewn on to a white linen patch base using blue linen.²³

So far, we have described the technical aspects of the textiles that were encountered. Considerable fabric degradation has happened. Dust that had permeated the smallest of crevices, holes and fibres proved to be one of the most serious factors causing damage; it is likely to have been the cause of various types of textile degradation. Mechanical damage was due to the slicing effect produced by razor-sharp dust particles such as silicates; chemical damage can be attributed to reactions between the fabric and underlying layers. Finally, biological damage was reflected in blotches caused by historic mould growth. Consequently, it was important to eradicate the thick grey layer of accreted dust as carefully and efficiently as possible. This was achieved with the help of a fine brush and a micro-museum vacuum cleaner with adjustable suction and a narrow pipette used as its nozzle.

Five hundred years of exposure to light had left visible marks on the organic material. This was most noticeable in relation to paper, parchment and textiles. The silk flowers and fabrics had

faded badly. The colours that we now see tend towards pale, beige tones; the bright pinks and reds have gone, as have all the variations of dark blue, yellow and brilliant green. Originally, the cabinets would have been a riot of colour. Unfortunately, light damage is irreversible and its treatment was limited as a result. Nevertheless, removing the grey accretion of dust appears to have brought some colour back to the cabinets.

Fluctuations in temperature and relative humidity had an effect on the shrinkage or expansion of the textiles and parchment. Given the many instances where silk for the flowers had been wrapped around a parchment mould, this caused tensile stress on the thread. Tension was increased where there was shrinkage, causing the parchment to slice through the fibres. The silk frayed first at the edges and fluttered down below. A great many broken silk threads were found in among the suctioned dust. Internal chemical decomposition of the silk thread also took its toll, such as the pulverisation of the white silk originally bleached with sulphur vapour.²⁴ The damage in this instance was an inherent feature of the production process and irreversible. Using a very fine brush, broken silk threads were glued in crucial places to the underlying supporting structure of parchment or brass wire wrapped in silk. Flower stems where the silk had loosened were also glued in this way and, sometimes, mercerised cotton yarn was additionally wound around them. This was performed in particular at the tapering extremity of the thicker structures, which were usually reattached to the peat base. Moreover, loose elements were reattached using a loop knot in fine two-ply silk in areas that were difficult to access.

With regard to the woven green silk around the peat base, we employed a dyed supporting tissue that was attached underneath the original with stitching. Using lightfast and waterproof dyes, several strips of pongee silk were dyed to match the colour of the damaged zones. Without dismantling the original, fragments of the new silk were slid between the underlying linen and the original green silk. The fragile areas were then secured with couching stitching, using the very finest hooked needle and polyester filament yarn. A high-transparency, green-dyed nylon tulle was fixed in place as an additional safeguard to protect the fragile surface of the original silk.

Ill. 143 (page 234)
Flowers from the Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den. The petals were made by wrapping white silk around parchment and decorating it with metallic gut thread, which was in turn wrapped tightly in even finer silk. Unfortunately, the metal's golden sheen has been lost

Ill. 144 (page 235)
Flowers from the Garden with a Calvary. The petals are made of circlets of brass wire wrapped in bright yellow silk floss, which were then wrapped again as a whole in the same yellow silk





**CONSERVATION
OF THE PAPER
AND PARCHMENT**

Concealed behind the flowers and figurines, the inner walls of the Enclosed Gardens are decorated with a paper background.

Originally, most of the wooden cabinets would have been clad in a special decorative paper, first painted in pinkish ochre, then overlaid with tinfoil and varnished. This backdrop would have shimmered and reflected in candlelight, serving to heighten the brilliance of the Enclosed Gardens. However, this paper degraded and the gleaming effect it once produced was entirely lost. For that reason, over the course of time the paper had been replaced.²⁵ This is certainly the case for both the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) and the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6), where marbled paper with a tree-bark pattern (bark marbled paper) was affixed to the backdrop. This type of decorative paper won particular popularity in the late nineteenth century, when it became possible to produce it on a semi-industrial basis. The Brepols company in Turnhout was one of the market leaders in the field, although there were innumerable other stationery suppliers that sold loose sheets of paper for lining drawers and boxes or as wrapping paper. However, as a result of acidification and adhesion to the oak surface, this late nineteenth-century paper became of poor quality, blistering and frequently tearing as a result. It was possible to repair this using Japanese conservation paper. The treatment of the original ochre-painted and tinfoil-clad paper in the aforementioned Gardens (G1 and G6) was a more complex business. The problem was that the varnish and tinfoil clinging to the paper in specks broke into fragments at the slightest touch. Treatment in this case had to be restricted to eliminating distortions and securing the edges with the very finest grade of Japanese paper.

Parchment, along with wire, forms the supporting structure for the many hundreds of flowers. The fairly white and thick parchment used in this case was carefully cut to measure to serve as petals and leaves. Leaving aside any minor distortion, this material has remained virtually intact. The *cedulae* (labels for the inscriptions for the relics) were written on thinner parchment and attached at a

few points on the rear wall by means of small nails or bone glue. Distortion was more evident with these small strips of parchment than in the case of the petals. During conservation treatment the hardened glue was removed from the back of the parchment and the *cedulae* were reattached using new copper tacks.

**CONSERVATION
OF THE WAX
ARTEFACTS
CALLED
AGNUS DEI**

Most of the Enclosed Gardens also house wax artefacts called Agnus Dei: small (or sometimes larger) medallions cast in wax with an image in bas-relief (Ill. 145). The Lamb of God is usually shown on the front

of the medallion, while the back portrays another subject, often that of Christ risen from the tomb. Pilgrims would buy Agnus Dei both to aid their spiritual salvation and as souvenirs to be taken back home. This explains how they also ended up in the Gardens in the form of flower-centres behind a wire lattice or as autonomous visual elements within a decorative frame of silk and wire.

As with most of the other artefacts in the Gardens, the Agnus Dei had become buried beneath a layer of dust and grime. Moreover, a noticeable white coating covered some parts of the medallions in the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1). Fourier-transform spectroscopy (FTIR) analyses conducted at the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA) in Brussels revealed that this was evidence of an internal alteration of the wax itself. Part of the wax substance appeared to have migrated to the surface, where it formed a thin, irregular layer with micro-fissures.²⁶ The reason for this is the orientation of the Gardens' storage place in the hospital sisters' convent. If the cabinet was in full sunlight, the temperature behind the protective glass could rise to such an extent that it left a white deposit on the surface – or the wax could even begin to melt, leaving drips on the surrounding textiles. Furthermore, ruptures and distortion would sometimes occur, and in the case of some of the Agnus Dei only a few flakes remain, as can be seen clearly in the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3). Cleaning was kept to a superficial level; it was impossible to reach



ILL. 145



ILL. 146

ILL. 145

Wax Agnus Dei prior to conservation. The whiteness of the wax was caused by internal alterations and migration to the surface – Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn

ILL. 146

Photomicrograph of the surface of the metal wire incorporated in the flowers. The linen core and the corrosion are clearly visible – Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn

the grime deeper down in the wax layer. However, small pieces of broken wax were glued back using a mixture of acrylic resin and solvent.²⁷

CONSERVATION OF THE METAL

A variety of metallic elements are found in each of the Enclosed Gardens (Ill. 146). Some objects are made entirely of metal,

such as the pilgrim badges and the sequins or leaf-shaped pendants. In other places, metal has been used purely as a supporting structure or connecting element and its functional quality is paramount, as seen in the many wires and nails holding the whole ensemble together. Many different types of metal were employed in the Gardens' creation: silver and silver-gilt, brass, lead alloys and wrought iron. The manufacturing techniques were also very wide-ranging: anything from simply fashioned wire all the way to castings and serially produced items using moulds. Consequently, we came across a great diversity of objects during the course of conservation treatment, ranging from highly sophisticated original works in precious metals to steel staples used in the twentieth century to secure loose flower stems to the wooden wall.

Treatment consisted chiefly of cleaning the many visible metal components, such as the brass sequins and silver badges. The cleaning was undertaken cautiously in order to maintain a harmonious

overall approach to the Gardens' conservation. Moreover, major cleaning would have been of little benefit to most of the metal without subsequent proper protection. In practice, a more radical type of cleaning – such as mechanical polishing (using fine abrasives) to remove corrosion – would entail too many risks for the fragile textiles and glass to which the metal was attached (e.g. the wire around the *paperolles* or the spiral thread around the badges behind thin sheets of glass). Aqueous after-cleaning was equally unfeasible where it would have involved intervention with, for example, moistened cotton buds.

The cruder wrought-iron mountings on the wooden cabinets were cleaned and chemically stabilised. Where necessary, moveable parts were secured and/or duplicated. Unsightly additions from recent interventions (such as the modern staples) were removed and replaced by more appropriate fastening materials. Depending on function and accessibility, this meant using linen yarn in some cases and a brass nail in others.

The undersides of the polychrome figurines in the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) were given customised brass supports, which were clad in green silk. This made it possible to improve the stability of the figurines without interfering with the fragile peat substrate. In the same Garden, two dogs were furnished with a small brass support in order to restore them to their original position.

ILL. 147 (page 238)

Front of the peat base – Garden with a Calvary

ILL. 148 (page 238)

Back of the dismantled peat base – Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den

ILL. 149 (page 239)

Back of the peat base – Garden with a Calvary

ILL. 150 (page 239)

Front of the peat base – Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den



Ill. 147



Ill. 148



Ill. 149



Ill. 150



ILL. 151

Blackberry made of red-black glass after treatment and reattached using a new fine brass wire wrapped in silk – Garden with St Ursula

CONSERVATION OF THE BEADS

Rather surprisingly, hidden within the Enclosed Gardens are hundreds of beads in all shapes and sizes, ranging from minuscule natural freshwater pearls barely the size of a pinhead to beautiful examples made of transparent blown glass, glass paste, polychromed wood, bone, ivory, amber, mother-of-pearl or coral, usually globular but sometimes faceted (Ill. 151). The large rock crystals in the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2) and the *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4) are exceptional – it is possible that they came from former (relic) presentations. It was only once the protective glass had been removed from the cabinets and a preliminary round of cleaning performed that the diversity of decorative elements was revealed in terms of the specific materials used and their manufacturing techniques.

The beads lend an additional accent to the *paperolles* used in the lattice structure, and enliven the flower petals and flower-centres. Many of them are silver-coated on the interior or exterior, but the sheen from this coating has been entirely lost, even after cleaning. As in the case of the metal sequins, they must have provided the Gardens with reflecting points of light. Nevertheless, some of the beads in the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3) have retained that eye-catching purpose; these are special hollow beads somewhat larger in diameter and made of double-walled glass with

gold leaf in between. The surface of these 'pearls' was stained with an orange coating to further enhance the gold effect.

As a rule, the beads are attached to one another using fine brass wire usually wrapped in silk. Metal and glass corrosion was observed in areas where metal and glass come into contact, particularly if the silk was missing or threadbare. This occurred as a result of localised condensation caused by fluctuating temperature and humidity. Under magnification it is possible to identify dark green specks of copper oxide on the brass wire and on the white crystals on the glass; this is evidence of a virtually unstoppable process of decomposition affecting the glass. Prior to treatment, the splendid blackberry bushes with their blackish-red berries in the *Enclosed Gardens with St Ursula* (G2), *with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6) and *with a Calvary scene* (G3) appeared covered in a white coating, but they are now properly visible again. In fact, the white crystals can be suctioned off using a brush and a micro-vacuum cleaning appliance. The blackberries were then immersed in a bath of synthetic resin to consolidate the glass.²⁸

Microscopic cracks in the structure of the glass can result from excessively humid conditions. This is known in the professional jargon as 'glass disease' or 'crizzling'. This is another irreversible form of atmospheric degradation. The decomposition process can only be slowed down under conditions of low relative humidity. Unfortunately, such treatment may prove harmful to other materials in the Gardens, such as the wood, parchment, paper and textiles. When deciding on the ambient climate for the cabinets in a museum setting, we sought out the optimum compromise for all the materials.²⁹

CONCLUSION

Conservation of the Enclosed Gardens' historical layering was of utmost importance to the team of conservator-restorers. Excessive cleaning or refurbishment of artefacts both large and small would have unbalanced the visual aspect of the Gardens and would have been an assault on their history. Studying the materiality and production of the Mechelen Enclosed Gardens was a unique experience for the team of conservator-restorers. The conservation workshop at the Museum Hof van



Ill. 152
Polychrome sculpture
after conservation
(front) – Garden
with Daniel in the
Lions' Den

Ill. 153
Polychrome sculpture
after conservation
(back) – Garden
with Daniel in the
Lions' Den

Ill. 154
Polychrome sculpture
after conservation
(underside) – Garden
with Daniel in the
Lions' Den

Busleyden, with proper microscopy and lighting facilities, was a one-off, ideal biotope for the Gardens, making it possible to undertake conservation treatment in the minutest detail. Working in partnership with Belgian and foreign experts from a variety of disciplines proved indispensable. In the future, the Gardens will be presented under strict museum conditions in display cases specially designed for the purpose and capable of monitoring climatic conditions.³⁰ The Gardens' vulnerability has been extensively documented and fragile sections were stabilised to the best possible degree, while new supporting materials were added discreetly. The conservation work that has been carried out and the optimum display conditions that have been created should protect the seven Mechelen Enclosed Gardens from deterioration in the decades to come, thus allowing us to continue gazing at them in wonder.³¹







ILL. 155

(pages 242–243)

Flowers from the Garden with a Calvary. In the spiral-shaped (now almost black) petals, we can see the brass wire core around which was wound a (now corroded) metallic gut thread with a linen core

1 Joke Vandermeersch and Lieve Watteeuw, 'De conservering van de 16de-eeuwse Mechelse Besloten Hofjes. Een interdisciplinaire aanpak voor historische mix-media,' in *Innovatie in de conservatie-restauratie*. Postprints van de internationale BRK-APROA / Onroerend Erfgoed Studiedagen 8, ed. Marjan Buyle (Brussels: Agentschap Onroerend Erfgoed, 2016), 41-52; Lieve Watteeuw, 'The Conservation of the Enclosed Gardens of Mechelen. A Closer Look at Fragile Mix Media,' in *In Search of Utopia. Art & Science in the Era of Thomas More*, ed. Jan Van der Stock (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press; Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2016), 213-214; Lieve Watteeuw, 'The Mechelen Enclosed Gardens: Conservation, Imaging and Analyses of the Early 16th-Century Mix-Media Retables,' in *Summer Course for the Study of Arts in Flanders, 2017, Medieval and Renaissance Sculpture in the Low Countries (s.l., 2017)*, 36-37; Marjolijn Debulpaep et al., 'Les Jardins Clos de Malines et l'avenir des objets historiques en techniques mixtes,' *Science connection*, 56 (April-June 2018): 10-14.

2 These publications relate to conservation projects for Enclosed Gardens outside the Mechelen collection. Balen Enclosed Garden: unpublished conservation report by Richardson-Weissenborn, Conservatie-restauratie en onderzoek, Dossier van de conservatiebehandeling van: een Besloten Hofje, Mechels atelier, eerste kwart zestiende eeuw, uit de St-Andrieskerk te Balen, 2008. Kalkar Enclosed Garden: Reinhard Karrenbrock and Marc Preez, 'Die "besloten hofjes" in St Nicolai in Kalkar,' in *Jahrbuch der rheinischen Denkmalpflege*, 44 (2014): 118-146; Martin Hammer and Gisela Hauck, 'Ein "Besloten Hofje" aus dem Johannesaltar in St Nicolaikirche in Kalkar,' in *Jahrbuch der rheinischen Denkmalpflege*, 44 (2014): 147-174. Arras Enclosed Garden: unpublished conservation report by Anaïs Gailhbaud, Institut national du patrimoine, Département des restaurateurs, *Le "Jardin clos" du Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Arras. Etude et analyse des matériaux d'une œuvre composite du XVIIe siècle. Restauration, recherche et propositions de conservation préventive en vue d'une nouvelle présentation*, Paris, 2007 (no. INP: INP 2006 159). Bentlage

Reliquary Gardens: *Westfalen. Hefte für Geschichte, Kunst und Volkskunde*, 77 (1999): 2-173.

3 These three Enclosed Gardens were completed in August 2016. They were displayed during the exhibition 'Op zoek naar Utopia' at Museum M, Leuven.

4 The specialist and technical photographic footage was produced by the Scientific Imaging Department of the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA), Brussels, and by the Digital Laboratory of the KU Leuven (University Library), for which we would like to extend our particular thanks.

5 Six of the seven Enclosed Gardens still possess shutters. The *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) is unique in no longer having shutters, but the impressions of hinges on its side walls bear testament to their original presence. Not all of the still extant Gardens were fitted with shutters; the one from Sint-Andrieskerk in Balen never had any.

6 It was possible to document this construction during the wholesale dismantling of the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1). This is probably analogous to the *Enclosed Gardens with St Ursula* (G2), *with a Calvary scene* (G3) and *with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6).

7 This original method of attachment could still be seen on the back of the temporarily dismantled inner cabinet containing the *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4). The *Enclosed Gardens with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1) and *with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6) underwent thorough restoration in the late 19th or early 20th century, during which other means of attachment – using cords and pins – were also discovered. Later, in the 20th century, even staples and nylon thread were used when reattaching elements that had come loose.

8 These stars are three-dimensional in the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1); they are thought to consist of a lead alloy and have been finished with a coat of gold-coloured (bronze) paint. In the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3) these are probably appliqué and glued stars with an ochre tonality. In the *Enclosed Garden with a Madonna* (G7) the stars were originally gold in colour, gilded using an ochre

mixture on a ground of blue azurite. The currently visible layer consists of an over-painting in imitation of that technique. The side walls of the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2) are blue but have been encrusted with relics. The side walls of the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6) were once blue but are now covered in late 19th- or early 20th-century paper. It is unclear whether stars underlie the paper.

9 The right-hand corner of the cornice in the *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4) was probably restored in the 19th century. Unlike other parts of the cabinet, no polychromatic applications have been encountered in this section.

10 The paint extends to the edges but does not run over them, which could indicate that the surrounding panel was sawn off.

11 In the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3) and the *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4), there are clearly visible traces of the (in all likelihood) original attachment that often-times passed through the inner wall using (brass) wire. In the case of Garden 3, this was reinforced and decorated with an additional (membrane) wire (see note 22) wound around it in a tight spiral. Initially, there would probably not have been any attachment to the back of the cabinet. Such attachments appeared only later, sometimes as a result of the inner wall showing signs of insufficient stability to support the weight of the figurines. In the *Enclosed Garden* from Sint-Andriesskerk in Balen, comparable attachment wires have been found around the cross of the Crucifix: in that regard, see the unpublished conservation report by Richardson-Weissenborn, p. 31.

12 Mixture is a paint that can act as a glue when gilding. If used with gold leaf, it cannot be polished. However, this is possible if the base consists of a layer of bole (a layer of clay, usually of a terracotta colour).

13 This was encountered only in the fabrics of Mary Magdalene and St John the Evangelist in the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1).

14 This relates to a mass (a mixture of preparation material, perhaps using chalk and wax) covered in a black layer

(tinfoil?). Gold leaf was placed on top of this on an underground of mixture, subsequently followed by a dark blue layer (azurite?). By employing the sgraffito technique, the letters in the name CORNIELIS were rasped away and as a result they now appear in gold.

15 No active infestation was found in the preliminary study made in 2014.

16 Information is not available with regard to the accurate dating of these historical restorations. Possibly in the 19th century, and certainly in the 20th, some of the figurines were taken in hand in order to re-secure the pictorial layer.

17 The white linen covering the thin base layer of peat in the *Enclosed Garden with a Crucified Christ* (G5) has been overlaid with green silk tissue to provide slightly more reinforcement. It has been made in plain weave with a small motif.

18 The *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4) may contain similar fabrics. No such *paperolles* appear in the *Enclosed Garden with a Crucified Christ* (G5) or the *Enclosed Garden with a Madonna* (G7), only other reliquary packets.

19 Owing to severe colour degradation caused by light, it has at times proved difficult to compare fabrics. For example, their position inside the cabinet can make the same type of fabric appear different where there has been degradation.

20 No information is available with regard to dating the repackaging of the *paperolles*. It is possible that it was done when the new background paper was placed on the inner wall of the cabinet, at the end of the 19th or beginning of the 20th century, as in the case of the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6).

21 In the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2), it is the peacock centrally positioned on the lawn behind the gate that draws our attention the most, but the widest-ranging collection of animals are in the *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4): a dog chasing a hare, a squirrel gnawing on a nut, snails, spiders, magpies and the dove from Noah's Ark.

22 A metal thread composed of silver-coated animal gut, wrapped around a textile core in an S-shaped spiral. This core consists of a textile thread made of bast fibre, spun in an S-shaped spiral and dyed using a yellow dye extracted from

dye's greenweed (*Reseda luteola*). The silvered gut enveloped the textile core almost entirely, lending it as a whole the appearance of a very delicate metallic thread. Sometimes such threads were also entwined or the thread was twisted around a wire in an open or, conversely, closed spiral, which produced different respective effects. The analysed sample 12893/08 is part of the object assigned the inventory number BH1-V-036-ML-OL. See analysis report 2015.12893 from the KIK-IRPA, Brussels, conducted by Ina Vanden Berghe and Maaïke Vandorpe.

23 We encountered bunches of grapes of this type on a linen base in the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn* (G1), the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2), the *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3) and the *Enclosed Garden with a Crucified Christ* (G5). The bunches of grapes in the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6) were also made of cherry stones wrapped in blue linen, but in this instance they were sewn to an iron structure wound with blue linen yarn, elongating them as a result.

24 E. Dijkmeijer, *Textiel. Deel III: Apprêtuur en onderzoek van vezels, garens en weefsels* (Amsterdam: Lieverlee, 1947), 39; Jeanette M. Cardamone and William N. Marmar. 'The Whitening of Textiles,' in *Chemistry of the Textiles Industry*, ed. Chris M. Carr (Dordrecht: Springer, 1995), 46-101.

25 EG1 were dismantled before 1917. The marbled paper is already in evidence in the photograph (glass negative, Ill. 7).

26 Fourier-Transform Infrared Spectroscopy (FTIR) is a scientific technique used to examine materials on the basis of their spectrum: the interaction with electromagnetic radiation at different energy levels. For example, the composition of the white layer can be compared with the wax at the core. This has to do with a migration of the components associated with the composition of beeswax and does not pertain to, say, mould, which would require a different approach. See analysis report 2012.11713 from the KIK-IRPA conducted by Marina Van Bos and Maaïke Vandorpe.

27 The large medallion riddled with fractures in the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2) had already been sewn on to a new supporting structure (using



...fute in
...ment meechden

...mcolaus

...Catharina
...Catharina
...Catharina





III. 156 (page 246)
Side view of the Garden with St Ursula. Relics, *cedulae* and medallions on the right-hand wing (before restoration)

III. 157 (page 247)
Side view of the Garden with a Calvary. Applied brocade on the right-hand wing

III. 158
Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den before restoration. The peat base and the sculptures have been removed for treatment

existing perforations) during an emergency procedure carried out in 2005; consequently, it required no further treatment.

28 The various studies on this issue in the past indicated that these crystals were usually formed as a result of secretions from one of the components of the glassy substance itself.

29 Willemien Anaf, 'Archeometrische studie van zeven Besloten Hofjes in functie van hun preventieve conservering' (Final report of the Comhaire Project within the context of ArtGarden. Art-technical research and conservation of historic mixed-media ensembles: 'Enclosed Gardens' / Kunsttechnisch onderzoek en behoud van historische mixed-media-ensembles: 'Besloten Hofjes', KIK-IRPA, dossier 2017.13391).

30 The Gardens' glass display cases are semi-integrated units using 55.2 laminated, extra-white glass. They consist of an aluminium structure lined with Forex boards. All the materials used for the display cases are inert. The backs of the display cases have a curved design, so there are no visible corners. Owing to the highly fragile condition of the Enclosed Gardens, vibration levels in the display case had to be dampened. For that reason the inner display case is separate from the outer display case. The base plate was placed on vibration isolators to absorb frequencies below 30 Hz. To provide further protection to the Gardens, this time against environmental dust and harmful gases, an airtightness of 0.1 air exchanges per day was implemented, which means in theory that once every ten days 'fresh' air from outside the display case replaces the enclosed volume of air. A passive climate-control system is employed to keep relative humidity at as constant a level as possible. This is achieved by placing silica gel underneath the display case's base plate at a relative humidity of 45%. To create proper ventilation, sufficient space was left between the volume of the display case and the silica gel compartments. To keep the temperature as constant as possible, the inner volume of the display case was fitted with thermal insulation throughout. As an additional measure to prevent warming, the lighting was placed behind glass, outside the volume of the display

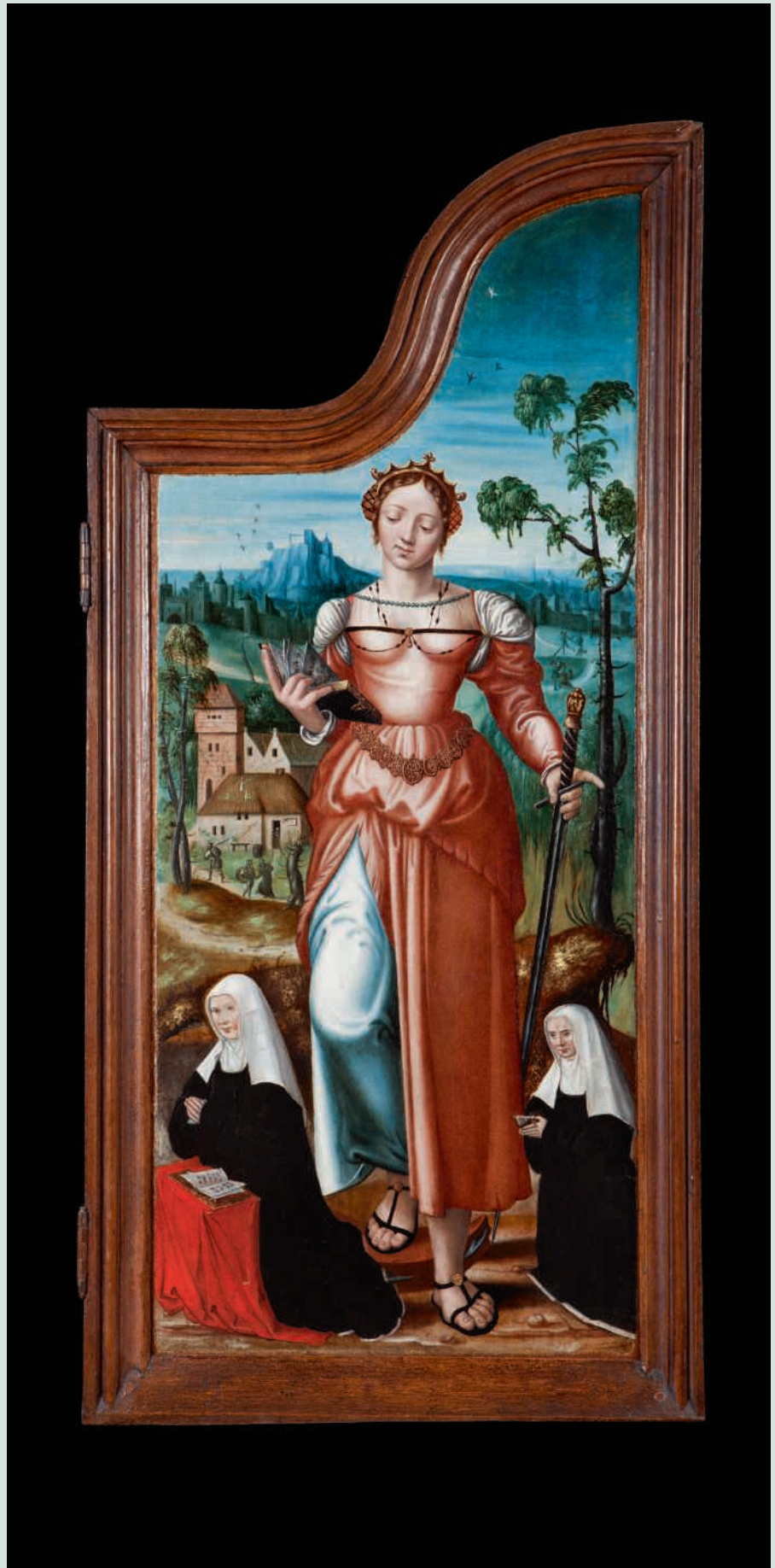
case. Both temperature and humidity are continuously monitored via a Wi-Fi-controlled data logger installed unobtrusively in the display case. The data can be monitored via an online 'cloud'. The Hof van Busleyden infrastructure team was assisted by the Preventive Conservation Unit from the KIK-IRPA; the display cases were produced by Meyvaert Glass in Ghent. Customised wooden crates were made to transport the Enclosed Gardens; transportation outside the museum (e.g. for the exhibition held at M Leuven in 2016) was carried out by Mobull Art Packers using a lorry with air cushions.

31 The conservation team would like to thank the staff of the Hof van Busleyden, as well as the researchers, photographers and fellow conservator-restorers in Belgium and abroad, for their input, cooperation and support over the course of this five-year project.



The Under- drawing of the Panels of the Enclosed Gardens

CHRISTINA CURRIE
HILDE WEISSENBORN



III. 159
Right panel depicting
St Catherine –
Garden with St Anne

Ill. 160

Detail of the underdrawing of the left and right wing – Garden with St Ursula

Infrared reflectography (IRR) detects underdrawings in four of the six Enclosed Gardens with painted side wings. These preparatory drawings would have been applied directly on to the ground or *imprimatura* layer of the panels and were most likely based on independent sketches. They would have served as a guide for the painting stage.

The underdrawing techniques and materials vary from one Enclosed Garden to another and it is clear that different hands were involved, some more experienced and skilled than others. The panels of the *Enclosed Garden with St Ursula* (G2), *Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene* (G3) and *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4) are underdrawn in a liquid, carbon-based medium, most likely black ink applied with a brush, while the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6) was underdrawn in a dry medium, probably black chalk. The panels of Garden 2 (*Enclosed Garden with St Ursula*) reveal the most complete and sophisticated underdrawings, applied with a confident, fluid touch by a single artist of considerable talent (Ill. 160). Parallel hatching strokes, sometimes curved in line with the forms, indicate shadows and half tones. During painting, the artist continued to improve the designs. For example, in the St James panel, he dropped trees and bushes in the upper left, added a windmill, adjusted the architectural arrangement to the right and added a decorative design to the side of the prie-dieu. He also rearranged the pleats in the saint's robe and changed the direction of the shoulder belt buckle. In the St Margaret panel, he moved the right sister's face down during painting, lowered the cross and abandoned a large tree branch, presumably to simplify the space above the saint's head.



The double-sided panels of Garden 3 (*Enclosed Garden with a Calvary scene*) have a plainer drawing style than Garden 2, with basic outlines for forms and no hatching. The same artist's style is recognisable in all four painted scenes. Particularly notable is the idiosyncratic way of drawing eyes, characterised by complete or partial circles sometimes joined by a line passing across the bridge of the nose (Ill. 161, two illustrations on the left).

As in Garden 2, the artist carried out many minor improvements during painting; for example, he made St Cornelius's cross more eye-catching by setting it at an angle and adding an additional crossbar (Ill. 161, illustration on the right). He also used the pouncing technique to transfer the brocade pattern of St Cornelius's garments from a pricked cartoon, placing the cartoon directly on the paint layer.



Ill. 161

The small *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4) panels have neat, functional underdrawings, again executed by one and the same hand. As with Garden 2, shadows and drapery folds are indicated with hatching strokes, but in Garden 4 they are tighter and more regular (Ill. 162 and 163). There are no modifications during painting.

Ill. 162



Ill. 163



Ill. 161

Detail of the under-drawing of the left wing – Garden with Calvary. The drawing style is plainer than the one in the Garden with St Ursula and no hatchings were used

Ill. 162

Detail of the right wing of the Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den

Ill. 163

Detail of the under-drawing – Garden with St Anne

ILL. 164

Details of the under-drawings of the left and right wing of the Garden with St Anne. Here the compositions have evolved most during painting of the designs and afterwards



The panels of the *Enclosed Garden with the Virgin and Child with St Anne* (G6) have wiry, dry-medium underdrawings (Ill. 164). Although hard to make out in most places, the underdrawings consist of simple, skilled renderings of outlines for the figures and rougher indications for the background. St Catherine's face reveals a particularly delicate underdrawing. Of all the Enclosed Garden wings, these compositions have evolved the most during and even after the main designs were painted. In the St Jerome panel, the lion was not foreseen and was added on top of the background layer during painting. The brim of St Jerome's hat was also reduced in size, probably to prevent it from overlapping the saint's drapery. In the St Catherine scene, IRR and X-radiography show that the two sisters were added after the paint layer was finished, but in a cruder painting style than the rest. A set of thick, black, short hatching strokes in the sleeve of the left sister may represent part of a rough underdrawing for these figures, but there is no indication of underdrawing of the dry-medium type seen in the main two compositions. It seems likely that these two sisters were a late addition to the St Catherine scene by another, less skilled painter (Ill. 164 and 166).



ILL. 165

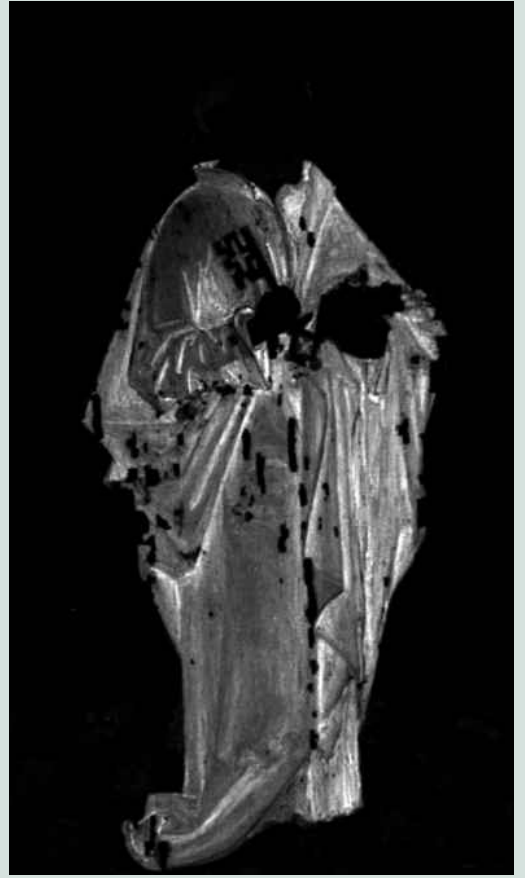
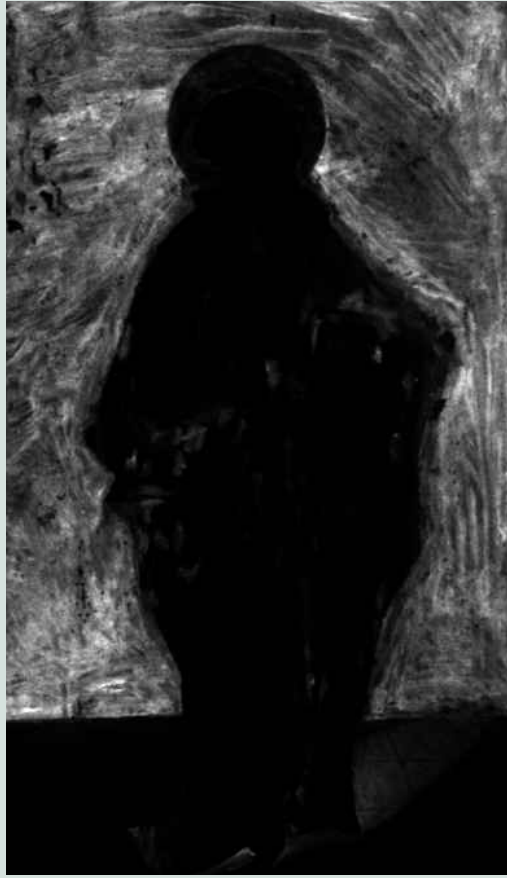
Infrared reflectography
of the left and right
panels of the Garden
with St Ursula



Ill. 166

Infrared reflectography
of the left and right
panels of the Garden
with St Anne





Material Analysis of the Panel Depicting St Peter

MARINA VAN BOS
HILDE WEISSENBORN
LIEVE WATTEEUW

ILL. 167 (top left)
St Peter on the left
shutter of the Garden
with Daniel in the
Lions' Den

ILL. 168
Macro X-ray fluo-
rescence scanning
with imaging for
iron (Fe-K α), copper
(Cu-K α), mercury
(Hg-L α) calcium
(Ca-K α), and lead
(Pb-L α) – Garden
with Daniel in the
Lions' Den

The *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4) is closed by two small oak shutters, with the inner side of the left shutter depicting St Peter, who is standing on a stone floor against a monochrome background (Ill. 167).¹ The saint is barefoot and is dressed in a wide, dark green cloak over a pale blue undergarment. In his right hand he is holding a key; in his left we see an open book. Over the course of time, this panel has undergone restoration work and has been partially overpainted to camouflage lacunae.

To gain more insight into the panel's original condition and its restoration history, it was analysed prior to conservation using macro X-ray fluorescence (MA-XRF) scanning. This analysis technique was developed quite recently and is not only capable of identifying the chemical elements on and beneath the surface of paintings, documents and so forth, but is also capable of visualising through high-resolution imagery the distribution of those chemical elements across the surface under analysis.²

The images display in black and white the respective distribution of iron, copper, mercury, calcium and lead, where black corresponds to the absence of the element concerned (Ill. 168). This element mapping

makes it possible to identify the pictorial layer. The reddish-brown background against which Peter has been depicted was painted on a chalk preparation using earth pigments and vermilion. Earth pigments were also used to render the shadow on the ground. The saint's apparel lights up in the images showing copper and lead distribution. The presence of copper may point in this case to the use of azurite (for the pale blue undergarment) and a copper-green pigment (for the cloak). The XRF analysis is unable to draw a distinction between the copper-acetate pigment verdigris and the copper-carbonate pigment malachite. White lead was applied for the paler tones of the undergarment and the highlights in the folds of the cloak.

These splendid colours and the finely detailed folds in the clothing, which we can see in the two XRF images, had been wholly invisible to the naked eye prior to conservation treatment.

Element mapping as a result of XRF analysis also illustrates the painting's condition. Dark green overpainting and darkened varnish covered the whole cloak, leaving the meticulously painted folds scarcely visible prior to conservation, if at all. As indicated above, the black 'spots' on the cloak in the images of copper and lead distribution point to lacunae in the layer of paint. This careless overpainting employed synthetic organic pigments, which would indicate a recent intervention (in the nineteenth or twentieth century). This non-destructive analysis has helped researchers and curator-restorers clarify the storage and conservation history of the left panel of the *Enclosed Garden of Daniel in the Lions' Den*.

1 The oak shutters that close the *Enclosed Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den* (G4) present St Peter on the left side and St Paul on the right. For a general description, please refer to p. 34 in this publication. The dimensions of the panel showing St Peter is 41.8 × 24.6 cm within the open shutter.

2 Research was performed at the laboratories of the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA). The analysis was conducted using an M6 Jetstream instrument (Bruker) equipped with a rhodium source (600 μ A and 50kV) and has the following measurement capabilities: a 500 μ m spot size, 400 μ m distance between the measurement points and 10 ms per pixel.







Ill. 169

(pages 258–259)

Detail of bunches of grapes that have faded as a result of light exposure – Garden with St Anne

Ill. 170

Bunches of grapes, faded owing to light exposure

Ill. 171

Details of degraded silk – Garden with St Anne



The Colourful Past of the Textiles in the Gardens

WILLEMIEN ANAF
MARJOLIJN DEBULPAEP
MARINA VAN BOS
INA VANDEN BERGHE

It is thanks to light that we are able to admire works of art in all their glory. However, light is simultaneously one of the most significant factors in causing damage to such works. Light is a form of radiation. A distinction is made between rays visible to the human eye (visible light) and rays of ultraviolet (UV) and infrared (IR) light. Visible light is all we need to be able to see an object. The energy from ultraviolet radiation is higher than that from visible light and as a result is even more damaging. Infrared radiation is chiefly responsible for heating up an object. Heritage items are given as much protection as possible against UV and IR radiation.

A great number of light-sensitive materials were incorporated within the Enclosed Gardens. The most delicate material was that of the textiles used to create the floral and vegetative elements, which lend the Gardens their distinctive appearance.

Thanks to the complete dismantling of the *Enclosed Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn (G1)*, it was possible to analyse both the front and reverse sides of its small textile fragments. The reverse displays bright colours, which are evidence of the original chromatic splendour of the Enclosed Gardens. Conversely, the front displays significant fading owing to centuries of exposure to the light (Ill. 169, 170 and 171).

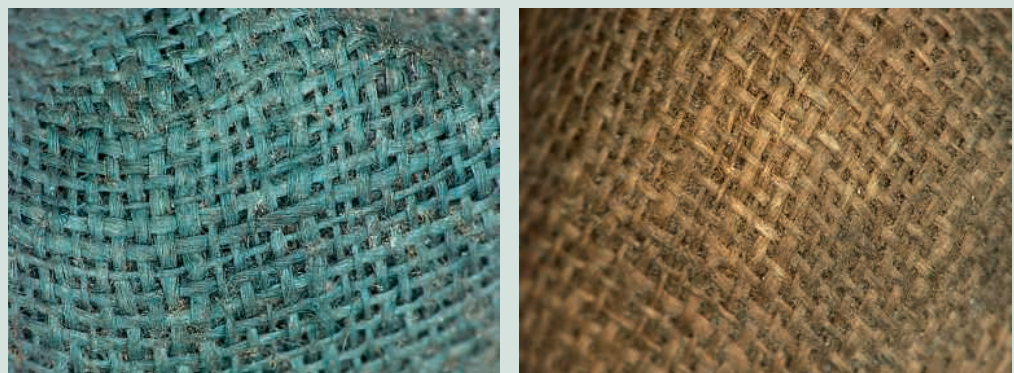
During laboratory research, colour measurements were taken of the front and reverse of several bunches of grapes and vine leaves. In addition, dye analysis was performed on a number of the fibres. The blue dye has been identified as the botanical substance indigo or woad (blue). The green colour is a combination of dyer's greenweed (yellow) and indigo or woad. The colour measurement and dye identification results were pooled to determine the colour loss and historic dose of light to which the Gardens had been exposed. This information was used to simulate future colour loss under a variety of lighting scenarios.

Radiation is also responsible for degrading the actual textiles. Silk is the most light-sensitive of all natural fibres. Degraded silk is brittle and weak, appearing yellowish in colour. There is clear evidence of silk's fragility in the Mechelen Enclosed Gardens (Ill. 172).

To keep future colour loss and further light damage to a minimum, the Enclosed Gardens are exhibited at the Museum Hof van Busleyden at a low illuminance of 50 lux, without UV radiation: a compromise between good visibility on the one hand and preventing further damage from light on the other. By completely dimming the lights around the Enclosed Gardens and giving our eyes time to adjust, we can still admire the Gardens even under such low levels of illuminance.

Ill. 172

Light degradation of the textile dyed in woad – Garden with the Hunt of the Unicorn



Late Fifteenth- to Early Seventeenth-century Enclosed Gardens and Related Shrines in Cities other than Mechelen

Ill. 173
Enclosed Garden, Royal
Museum of Fine Arts
Antwerp, inv. 5094

A SELECTION OF NARRATIVE MIXED-MEDIA CASES¹

Belgium

Enclosed Garden, Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen, inv. 5094

Enclosed Garden, Balen, Sint-Andrieskerk

Enclosed Garden with St Leonard, Sint-Lenaarts (Brecht), Sint-Leonarduskerk

Reliquary with busts, Diest, Stadsmuseum De Hofstadt

Enclosed Garden with Mercy Seat, Diest, Stadsmuseum De Hofstadt

Enclosed Garden, Geel, Sint-Dimpnakerk

Enclosed Garden with the Virgin, Herentals, Begijnhofmuseum

Miniature reliquary, Bruges, Zwartzusters-Augustinessen

Shrine with reliquary busts, Steenokkerzeel (Melsbroek), Sint-Martinuskerk

Reliquary, Tongerlo, Onze-Lieve-Vrouwabdij van Tongerlo

Reliquary, Marche-les-Dames (Namur), Abdij Notre-Dame du Vivier (church)

Reliquary, Bruges, Sint-Godelieveabdij

France

Enclosed Garden, Arras, Musée des Beaux-Arts, inv. 945-3-45

Germany – Rhineland

Enclosed Garden, Walsrode, St Johannis-der-Täufer Kirche

Reliquary with a Calvary (Reliquiengärten), Bentlage, Museum Kloster Bentlage

Reliquary with Christ crucified (Reliquiengärten), Rheine, Museum Kloster Bentlage

Predella of the altar of St John, Kalkar, St Nikolai Kirche

Predella of the Trinity Altar, Kalkar, St Nikolai Kirche

Reliquary, Frechen-Königsdorf, Magdalenenkapelle

Reliquary cushions, Ebstorf (Uelzen), Kloster Ebstorf

¹ This list is by no means exhaustive.







List of Authors

III. 174
(pages 264–265)
Christ on the Cross –
Garden with a Calvary

III. 175
Crucified Christ –
Garden with
a Crucified Christ

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The Partners of the Enclosed Garden Project (2014-18)

MUSEUM HOF VAN BUSLEYDEN

The Museum Hof van Busleyden in Mechelen reopened in 2018 after several years of renovation. Starting from the building's identity as the former home of the humanist Hiëronymus van Busleyden (1470-1513), visitors to the museum are now able to explore and experience Burgundian and early Habsburg culture. The magnificent historical palace is once again a dazzling microcosm of the Burgundian city and of early Renaissance ideas. Visitors are welcomed into a real humanist house (as Thomas More once called it), where they meet several cosmopolitan and innovative thinkers, makers, rulers, citizens and artists, who still fuel the imagination and continue to inspire people today. During these Burgundian encounters, visitors also discover the contemporary city of Mechelen, which, surprisingly enough, often uses Burgundian values as a starting point for its development, albeit with a modern twist.

The Burgundian era is a remarkable and defining chapter in the history of the Low Countries. Under the rule of the Burgundian princes, the region experienced unprecedented political, economic and cultural growth. For the first time in their history, the Low Countries were united into a single political entity, while the cities of Flanders and Brabant became hubs in a trading network that extended

across most of the known world. Prominent personalities such as Jan van Eyck, Pieter Bruegel, Desiderius Erasmus and Rembert Dodoens ensured the region became famous for its arts, crafts and science.

During the transition from the Burgundian to the early Habsburg period, Mechelen was an important political and cultural centre, especially during the period from the installation of the Parliament of Mechelen (1473) to Margaret of Austria's death (1530). Mechelen was where the Great Council, the highest legal court in the Low Countries, was established; where successors to the throne, such as Charles V, were raised; and where emerging Renaissance ideas first began to take root in the Low Countries. Today, the Museum Hof van Busleyden wants to be an essential meeting place for visitors to the lively city of Mechelen – just as it used to be in the Burgundian era. The museum creates encounters based on objects in its collection and on people's stories that various heritage institutions, cultural stakeholders, educational institutions and the people of Mechelen have helped develop – and will continue to do so.

> www.hofvanbusleyden.be

THE MASTERPIECES COUNCIL – COUNCIL FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE MOVABLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Masterpieces Decree aims to protect moveable cultural heritage that must be preserved for the Flemish Community in Flanders due to its exceptional archaeological, (cultural-) historical, artistic or academic significance.

A Masterpieces List has been drawn up to provide an inventory of these rare and indispensable cultural goods.

The Council for the Preservation of Moveable Cultural Heritage – the Masterpieces Council – advises the Minister of Culture on the application of the Masterpieces Decree and, in particular, on the inclusion of cultural goods into the Masterpieces

List. It also advises the minister on whether or not any planned physical interventions to these listed cultural goods can be allowed.

Conservation and restoration measures to listed cultural goods are subsidised up to a maximum of 80 percent of the total cost. The collection of seven Enclosed Gardens in Mechelen was recognised as a Flemish Masterpiece in 2012. Within the context of that recognition, the Flemish government pursued and co-financed the Gardens' conservation and restoration.

> www.topstukken.be

KING BAUDOUIIN FOUNDATION – BAILLET LATOUR FUND

The Baillet Latour Fund's remit is to take a consistent approach in fostering, utilising and facilitating excellence in human endeavour, as well as to pay attention to social developments in those respects. Alfred, Count de Baillet Latour, shareholder and director of the Artois Brewery and a great humanist, died without any direct heirs and bequeathed his shares to the setting up of a fund whose focus had to be the human condition: to be more specific, a fund that focused on the most edifying aspects of humanity. That perspective continues to be the guiding principle for all the projects and initiatives to which the Baillet Latour Fund lends its solicitous support. Excellence can be expressed in many ways. It is for that reason that, over time, the Fund's scope of application has been divided among four sectors: health, culture, education and sport.

Belgium can boast a remarkable wealth of heritage in museums. To help preserve that heritage, the Fund decided in 2000 to finance the restoration of buildings and works of art with a special artistic and cultural significance. In partnership with the King Baudouin Foundation, which has placed its heritage expertise at the Fund's disposal, an annual selection is made of projects to which the Fund will be lending its support so that the masterpieces in these projects can continue to attest to the excel-

lence of human endeavour underpinning them. This programme was initiated in 2002. Since then, the Fund has collaborated on more than eighty important projects, including the restoration of the Bible of Anjou, the restoration of the Rubens paintings held at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, the Lambert Lombard series *The Virtuous Women* and *The Seven Sacraments* by Rogier van der Weyden.

> www.kbs-frb.be

> www.fondsbailletlatour.com

ILLUMINARE – CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF MEDIEVAL ART (KU LEUVEN)

Illuminare – Centre for the Study of Medieval Art (KU Leuven) is a university-led research and documentation centre. It is situated in the University Library (Ladeuzeplein in Leuven) and is accessible to both academics and students. Its focus on medieval and early modern art from the Southern Low Countries within a European perspective is facilitated by both research and doctoral projects that are in turn supported by a vast international network of universities, institutions and museums.

Illuminare conserves and catalogues illuminated manuscripts and carries out art-technical research (Book Heritage Lab). Recent research and conservation projects performed by the Book Heritage Lab – KU Leuven include the *Codex Eyckensis* (eighth century) (2016-18); the illuminated manuscripts from the Mayer van den Bergh Museum (2014-19); the technological study of the Enclosed Gardens of Mechelen (ArtGarden, 2016-20); and the Bruegel drawings and prints project (Fingerprint, 2016-20). Equally, Illuminare examines, through an interdisciplinary approach, the iconology of medieval art (Iconology Research Group). Recent research projects of the Iconology Research Group include the study of the phenomenon of ‘John the Baptist’s head on a platter’ (2012-16); the study of liturgical objects and their use in Belgian collections (OrnaSacra, 2017-21); and the examination of the afterlife of the figure of Kairos (2017-21).

The research centre holds and manages several research archives previously owned by renowned art historians. Illuminare organises national and international exhibitions, of which the most recent include *In Search of Utopia* (2016-17, M-Museum Leuven); *Hieronymus Cock – The Renaissance in Print* (2013, M-Museum Leuven and Fondation Custodia, Paris); *Magnificent Middle Ages* (2013, Museum Plantin-Moretus, Antwerp); *The Anjou Bible – A Royal Manuscript Revealed* (2010, M-Museum Leuven); and *Rogier van der Weyden 1400/1464 – Master of Passions* (2009, M-Museum Leuven).

In addition, the research centre publishes four in-house publications: *Corpus of Illuminated Manuscripts*, *Art and Religion*, *Studies in Iconology*, and *Iconologies*. Illuminare also produces exhibition catalogues and colloquium proceedings.

> www.illuminare.be

THE ROYAL INSTITUTE FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE

Established in 1948, the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage is one of ten scientific institutions falling under the Federal Ministry of Scientific Policy. KIK-IRPA is committed to the cataloguing, scientific study, conservation and promotion of the country's artistic and cultural property. The Institute, whose chief mission is research and public service, is a unique instrument for the heritage of our country, both movable and immovable.

Three departments bring together art historians, photographers, chemists, physicists and conservator-restorers, who serve museums, churches, public collections and listed monuments. Art from private collections is also studied, as long as it is of significant art-historical or cultural interest. The Laboratories department at the KIK-IRPA comprises nine different divisions, seven oriented to a specific material, and two involved with dating techniques (C14 or radiocarbon dating and dendrochronology). The main task of the Documentation department is to make a photographic inventory of Belgium's cultural heritage. The imagery section works in close collaboration with art historians from the department. The Documentation department comprises a library, a photographic library, the Centre for the Study of the Flemish Primitives, an art history research section, a digitisation unit, a photographic and scientific imagery unit and an archive section.

The Conservation-Restoration department consists of six different studios, each dedicated to a different type of art (textiles, glass, paintings,

wooden polychrome sculpture, stone sculpture, wall painting), as well as the unit for the study of decorative finishes on historic buildings and the Preventive Conservation Unit. The Preventive Conservation Unit, founded in 2007, advises on the correct conservation conditions for works of art and collections based on a holistic approach and an analysis of the ten most significant factors in terms of potential damage to cultural heritage. The research project entitled ArtGarden (Art Technology Research and the Conservation of Mixed-media Ensembles: 'Enclosed Gardens') and the Comhaire project are perfectly suited to the KIK-IRPA's mission. The Jean-Jacques Comhaire Fund and Prize under the King Baudouin Foundation financed the study for the preventive conservation of the Mechelen Enclosed Gardens. ArtGarden is supported financially by the BRAIN programme (Belgian Research Action through Interdisciplinary Networks) under BELSPO and is carried out by the Preventive Conservation Unit and the Laboratories department at the KIK-IRPA, the KU Leuven (Illuminare – Centre for the Study of Medieval Art, Book Heritage Lab) and the University of Antwerp (AXES). The initial focus is on the Enclosed Gardens and their highly specific degradation and conservation issues. The project aims to gather knowledge from this in order to define the ideal conservation conditions for each type of mixed-media artefact.

> www.kikirpa.be

III. 176

(pages 272)

God speaking to Moses
in the bramble bush –
Garden with the Hunt
of the Unicorn

III. 177

(pages 273)

Gideon kneeling –
Garden with the Hunt
of the Unicorn



est rubus ardens amor



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III. 178

(pages 280–281)
 Squirrel with nut and dog with collar made from wire, beads and silk – Garden with Daniel in the Lions' Den

III. 179

(pages 284–285)
 Rear of the Enclosed Gardens' wooden cabinets





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**Museum presentation of the Enclosed
Gardens – Museum Hof van Busleyden**

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Realisation

Potteau Labo in collaboration with
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Museum lighting

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Multimedia & audio

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CATALOGUE

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