Nuns as Gardeners: Using and Making Enclosed Gardens

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The late medieval art genre known as *Hortus Conclusus, Besloten Hofje*, and Enclosed Garden, functions as narrative scene, reliquary, and multi-media installation.[1] Thus defined within the parameters of hybrid sculptural object, the production of Enclosed Gardens is specific to the sixteenth-century and the geographical entity of the Low Countries.[2] Within this continuum, the Augustinian Order known as the Hospital Sisters of Mechelen sponsored the manufacture of Enclosed Gardens.[3] Seven of these objects survive today, and various art historians have woven an intricate tapestry of scholarship around the objects. Throughout the writing on Enclosed Gardens, the performativity of the objects continuously exposes the limitations of traditional art historical methodologies. At once high and low, dynamic and static, chaotic and structured, iconographic and obscure, Enclosed Gardens challenge the taxonomic impulses defining the landscape of art history. In the words of Barbara Baert, Enclosed Gardens "put a spell on time."[4] This "spell" suspends art historical notions of the completeness of objects, and even the typological classification of Enclosed Gardens evades secure definition.

This paper contends that the in-between quality of Enclosed Gardens points to uses attendant to those previously imagined. For the Mechelen Hospital Sisters who used these objects, the in-between qualities of Enclosed Gardens relate to medieval love spirituality and a process of pious labor that cultivated the soul in preparation for union with God. Asserting the limitations of an early modern-focused framework, this paper considers the sacred work performed on Enclosed Gardens within the context of contemporary designations of utopia. Elizabeth Grosz defines utopia as an abstract system of thought in which time, spatiality, and duration collide.[5] Unlike utopian systems that retain hierarchical (and gendered) distinctions between and throughout bodies, the Groszian utopia outlined here represents a fluid environment in which such definitions collapse. Enclosed Gardens present an alternative spatiality to the consensus of culture displayed in utopian projects involving art and architecture. This paper considers the socio-cultural circumstances informing the condition of utopia observed in Enclosed Gardens, and proposes a foundation in a thematic of gender for reasons related to the objects' production. Ultimately, this paper will conclude that the qualities of in-betweenness possessed by Enclosed Gardens perpetuate a permanent state of becoming, a condition first activated in their making.

Enclosed Gardens share certain material features. Consider *Enclosed Garden with Saints Elisabeth, Ursula, and Catherine*, constructed *circa* 1525 (Figure 1). The format of the object consists of a large oak box supplemented by two hinged side panels painted with representations of saints and donors.[6] Similar to a triptych, the side panels close and open around the central oak box. Unlike traditional painted altarpieces, the Enclosed Garden features a diversity of media within the central box. A painted and/or upholstered fabric ground accommodates forms ranging from delicately-crafted silk foliage to sculpted three-dimensional polychrome sculp-

1 Barbara Baert traces the genealogy of Enclosed Gardens to fourteenth-century objects that consisted of small statues decorated with paper flowers installed behind glass in small boxes. See 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, 10n2.

2 Rudy notes the locations of surviving Enclosed Gardens in Mechelen, the Béguinage of Herentals, St. Leonard's Church in Zoutleew, Diest, Arras, and a hospital in Geel. Additionally, the collection of the Museum voor Schone Kunsten includes an Enclosed Garden. Kathryn Rudy, *Virtual Pilgrimages in the Convent: Imagining Jerusalem in the Late Middle Ages* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2011), 112. See also Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1998), 76-77; and Gisela Ecker, "Allegorical Gardens of Desire in Modernity," in *The Art of Interpreting*, ed. Susan C. Scott, Papers in Art History from Pennsylvania State University (University Park, PA: Pennyslvania State University, 1995), 9: 262-63.

3 The Hospital Sisters belonged to an Augustinian working order that typically managed hospitals. Unlike contemplative orders, the Hospital Sisters experienced substantial contact with lay peoples. Rudy notes that the diversity of objects within Enclosed Gardens reflects the variety of connections the nuns made with the laity. See Rudy, *Virtual Pilgrimages*.

4 Baert, "Echoes of Liminal Spaces," 38-39.

5 Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

6 Painting workshops executed the painted panels and figural sculpture included in Enclosed Gardens. See note to Figure 30 in Rudy, "Dirty Books: Quantifying Patterns of Use in Medieval Manuscripts Using a Densitometer," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 2, no.1 (2010): 13; and Rudy, *Virtual Pilgrimages*, 113. Baert asserts that groups of makers responsible for the various components of Enclosed Gardens reflect the gendered divisions of art making, which encompasses "masculine canonized figurative art and feminine domestic art." See

ture. Iconographic attributes identify the figural sculptures in Figure 1 as the Saints Elisabeth, Ursula, and Catherine. Although expressing a unique saintly personality, each figure wears comparable clothing, shares a similar *contrapposto* posture, and stands on a surface fashioned to imitate a hill. The anatomy of a primary white orb informs an attendant network of similarly shaped sculptural elements, including portrait medallions and pilgrimage badges from the great shrines of Europe and the Holy Land.[7] Sculptural spheres function as a compositional structuring device on the surface immediately behind and above each figure, generating a grid-like pattern within the diorama's greater visual field. Fabric and thread-wrapped reliquary *ampullae* intersect around each circular shape, small but significant trinkets from a vast sacral geography. Some relics are wholly or partially exposed, others are wrapped in textiles and enriched with silk flowers, gems, and thread. Silk-fabric interpretations of flora and fauna blossom around the neatly ordered constellation of ornamented holy remains.[8] Foliage executed in red, green, white and gold thread covers nearly every available space. Upon close looking, several thematic groups of foliage emerge: the upper third contains imitation grapes; large floral forms dominate the middle section and line the frame; and small flowers sprout from the hill-like form encompassing the lower-third of the composition. A scaled simulation wooden gate—covered in flowers and imitation grapes—runs along the bottom of this mound.

A hagiographical consideration of *Enclosed Garden with Saints Elisabeth, Ursula, and Catherine* demonstrates that Enclosed Gardens testify to spiritual concerns unique to the Mechelen Hospital Sisters. Saint Elisabeth served as the patron saint of the Hospital where the sisters worked.[9] Cloistered nuns like those in Mechelen revered Saint Catherine of Egypt, the patron saint of virgins and unmarried women known equally for her philosophical learning.[10] Saint Ursula and the associated cult of Eleven Thousand Virgins enjoyed particular local significance; the remains of the Virgins were discovered in nearby Cologne in 1106, and the strategic distribution of those saintly relics through the Middle Ages informed the city's status as a pre-eminent pilgrimage destination.[11] Likewise, a growing cult of Marian icons in the Mechelen Diocese argued for the city's incorporation into regional pilgrimage itineraries.[12] Saint Ursula's inclusion in the Enclosed Garden equates the Mechelen pilgrimage with those undertaken to Cologne. Together, the saints in *Enclosed Garden with Saints Elisabeth, Ursula, and Catherine* generate a site-specific, socio-spiritual narrative.

In addition to the devotional topography expressed in the content of Enclosed Gardens, their production reflects devotional practices deriving from medieval love spirituality. Both Jeffrey Hamburger and Reindert Falkenberg agree that all genders engaged with medieval love spirituality, the goal of which comprised a union with God that ultimately negated the defining characteristics of the body.[13] However, Gisela Ecker and Barbara Newman assert that the erotic undertones of medieval love spirituality, as delineated in the Song of Songs, engage with heterosexual desire and securely defined gender roles.[14] Medieval love spirituality contended that, like Christ, God formed the soul in the image of Himself and upon death the soul would be re-united with its maker. Theologians drew an analogy between the experience of the *unio mystica* and the Song of Songs, an Old Testament canticle concerning sexual desire and union.[15] In this passage, a man and a woman articulate their longing for each other.[16]

Baert, "Echoes of Liminal Spaces," 10.

7 Rudy expands upon the significance of the presence of relics in Rudy, *Virtual Pilgrimages*, 114.

8 Mechelen women's religious groups—including various Beguine cooperatives and the Augustinian Hospital Sisters—manufactured and exported the silk flowers used in Enclosed Gardens. As noted in Hamburger, *Visual and the Visionary*, 77; and Rudy, *Virtual Pilgrimages*, 113.

9 Rudy, "Dirty Books."

10 Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies/Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 87-88 and 127-28.

11 Joan A. Holladay, "Relics, Reliquaries, and Religious Women: Visualizing the Holy Virgins of Cologne," *Studies in Iconography* 18, (1997): 67-118.

12 Following an ecclesiastical re-organization in 1559, Mechelen assumed joint leadership of the Archdiocese of Mechelen-Brussels, a move that effectively confirmed the position of Mechelen and its attendant Marian shrines within a larger network of pilgrimage sites. The prominent Marian cult on the *Scherpenheuvel* ("steep hill") in the adjacent municipality of Scherpenheuvel-Zichem originated *circa* 1500. With roots in the pre-Christian worship of a holy oak tree on the *Scherpenheuvel*, the Virgin Mary miraculously intervened in the theft of a sculptural image of herself hanging from said oak tree. Devotion to the *Maria-in-de-eik* ("Mary in the Oak") sculpture accelerated in the 1550s as evidence of the tree/image's miraculous healing powers proliferated. Closer to Mechelen's urban center, the hamlet of Henswijk possessed a miracle-working image of the Virgin Mary recorded as early as 1272. The original miraculous sculpture disappeared in 1580. Replaced in 1587, the sculpture can be found today at the Basilica of Our Lady of Scherpenheuvel, the church built with funds donated by the Spanish Habsburg dynasty, which took up patronage of the site following the Spanish conquest of Flanders. See Dresen Grietja, "Love Gave You a Thousand Names," in *Backlit Heaven: Power and Devotion in the Archdiocese Mechelen* (Tielt: MMMechelen vzw, 2009), 67-83.

13 Hamburger, *Visual and the Visionary*, 24-30; and Reindert Leonard Falkenburg, *The Fruit of Devotion: Mysticism and the Imagery of Love in Flemish Paintings of the Virgin and Child, 1450-1550* (Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Pub., 1994), 60-65.

14 Ecker, "Allegorical Gardens," 262-64; Barbara Newman, "Gender," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. Julia A. Lamm (Chichester, UK: Blackwell, 2012), 42-43; Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 137-67; and Newman, *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 138-89.

The man speaks of the woman metaphorically, describing her body—"a garden enclosed"—in sensual, botanical terms, and expresses his wish to engage with her body through actions like touching, drinking, eating, and smelling.[17] Offered in terms of hetero-normative sexual expression, the consummative activities performed on and by the feminine body in the Song of Songs can be thought of as an allegory for the *unio mystica* of love spirituality. Though Falkenberg disputes the value of gendering sensual or corporeal experiences, both Hamburger and Newman utilize the work of Caroline Walker Bynum to explore the ways in which spiritual practices relying on the body reverberated with women's religious communities.[18] Medieval women's religious communities embraced the Song of Songs, and considered the passage to connote the bond between religious women and Christ.[19] In this scenario, religious women assumed the role of bride, and Christ, the role of bridegroom; the "garden enclosed" quoting sexual purity.[20]

Although restricting some forms of bodily expressions, medieval love spirituality offered women a means of accessing the sacred within their bodies. Bynum argues that women in enclosed settings placed their bodies at the center of devotional practice, thereby spiritually elevating the feminine body.[21] Material culture made by and speaking to women in enclosed settings reflects an interest in the feminine body. The Enclosed Garden object referenced thus far features women saints in the central box of the triptych structure. The canonization of such saints depended on real or perceived sexual purity, and hagiographical celibacy functioned as a guide for those assuming a comparable lifestyle. Although performed in enclosed settings, vows of chastity derived from male-dominated religious and social structures which attributed negative valuations to feminine bodies and attempted to control these bodies as one would a piece of property.[22] Enclosed Gardens operated within such structures and reinforced a doctrine of chastity regulating women's bodies in real space. The physical structure of Enclosed Gardens mimics the action of saintly abstinence—literally, a "garden locked up."

The Augustinian Hospital Sisters certainly encountered everyday spatialities defined by gender politics. Although Hospital Sisters constituted the labor force supporting Mechelen hospitals, the leadership of the hospitals remained in the hands of male doctors and clerical supervisors. In addition to their medical vocation, the spiritual lives of religious women were subject to male ecclesiastical authority. Within enclosure, however, women actualized distinctive devotional practices as evidenced by remnants of their material culture. Jeffrey Hamburger, cautioning against interpreting such material culture as completely autonomous "self-representations," nevertheless contends that the religious objects employed by cloistered women functioned differently from those used

15 Falkenburg, *Fruit of Devotion*, 17-18; and Falkenburg, "The Scent of Holyness: Notes on the Interpretation of Botanical Symbolism in Paintings by Hans Memling," in *Memling Studies*, ed. Hélène Verougstraete-Marcq, Roger Van Schoute, and Maurita Smeyers (Leuven, Belgium: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1997), 153.

16 Influenced by the writing of the Greek Church father Origen, medieval church theologians offered a variety of interpretations of the Song of Songs that informed the meanings of the passage to women's religious communities. For a succinct review of interpretations of the Song of Songs, see Falkenburg, *Fruit of Devotion*, 16-18.

17 Song of Solomon 4: 10-15:

> How much more pleasing is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your perfume more than any spice! Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb; my bride; milk and honey are under your tongue. The fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon. You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain. Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with choice fruits, with henna and nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with every kind of incense tree, with myrrh and aloes and all the finest spices. You are a garden fountain, a well of flowing water streaming down from Lebanon.

18 Hamburger, *Visual and the Visionary*, 22-30; Newman, "Gender," 53-54; and Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987).

19 Baert, "Echoes of Liminal Spaces," 12-16; Baert, "Late Medieval Enclosed Gardens of the Low Countries" (Weimar, Germany: Internationale Kolleg für Kulturtechnikforschung und Medienphilosophie (IKKM), 2015), https://vimeo.com/128393207; and Baert, "The Gaze in the Garden: Body and Embodiment in 'Noli Me Tangere,'" *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 58 (2007-2008): 27-28; and Newman, "Gender," 42-46.

20 By the late Middle Ages, women's religious consecration rituals resembled marriage ceremonies performed for lay couples. See Lasse Hodne, *The Virginity of the Virgin: A Study in Marian Iconography* (Rome: Scienze e Lettere, 2012), 28-29.

21 See especially Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 260-76.

22 For all their apparent independence, the Augustinian Hospital Sisters operated under a system that controlled and regulated the activities of women. Jo Ann McNamara links later medieval urbanization trends with an evolving restriction of women's physical and spiritual mobilities. Citing Caroline Walker Bynum, McNamara outlines how an eleventh-century surge in population encouraged moves from rural communities to cities. The Roman Church concurrently implemented policies that imposed male-dominated structures on the religious lives of urbanized women. At the end of the thirteenth-century, Pope Boniface VIII issued a bull that effectively cloistered all religious women and mandated male oversight of cloistered women's activities. Bernard of Clairvaux, writing at the close of the twelfth century, equated women with heresy for enticing monks from their vows of celibacy. In the intimate environment of the city, the supposedly heretical nature of women stimulated the development of what McNamara terms a "broad womanless space." Previously casual economic industries converted into the formal guild system, which relegated women's labor to the "un-skilled" and low-paying peripheral tasks noted above. Burgeoning city governments restricted bureaucratic offices to men, further reiterating the gendered ideologies undergirding urban space. See Jo Ann McNamara, "City Air Makes Men Free and Women Bound," in *Text and Territory: Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages*, ed. Sylvia Tomasch and Sealy Gilles (Philadelphia, PA: Univer-

by religious men.[23] Responding to and working within the conditions of enclosure, Enclosed Gardens portray a feminized piety.

Enclosed Gardens do more than reiterate exclusion. In addition to testifying to a spirituality unique to late medieval religious women in general and the Hospital Sisters in particular, the objects also provided spaces for the conceptual performance of that spirituality.[24] Medieval love spirituality advocated devotional exercises that cultivated the soul in preparation for the *unio mystica*, and such devotional exercises often replicated the dynamics of consumption and consummation in the Song of Songs. As outlined in the Song of Songs, the mystical union with Christ was performed at the boundaries of the senses. Grounded in the sensual world, the biospheres of Enclosed Gardens create environments conducive to the type of spiritual encounter outlined in the *unio mystica*.[25] One can argue that the flora and fauna merely mimic nature; however, even today, viewers and users of Enclosed Gardens have embodied responses to static forms. Users enter Enclosed Gardens visually, and, according to Baert, the multiplicity of objects constituting Enclosed Gardens evokes smell, taste, touch, and even aurality.[26] Enclosed Gardens therefore arouse a sense profile meant to provoke the *unio mystica* outlined in love spirituality, a sense profile present even in the making of these objects.

Scholars like Baert and Paul Vandenbroeck describe the making of Enclosed Gardens as inducing a meditative state equivalent to prayer.[27] In addition to labor conditions characterized by the intertwining of work with prayer, this paper considers the spiritual implications of the sensual exertion of the body. The technology of making and re-making Enclosed Gardens engages the body, the locus of the Mechelen Hospital Sisters' devotional practices. The haptics of making Enclosed Gardens—of threading silk, sewing fabric, and wrapping relics—required the making body to be active, imbuing that body with authority. Through making, the body assumes the roles of creator and consumer, privileged with the ongoing task of fashioning coherent meanings from divergent objects.

Kathryn Rudy argues that Enclosed Gardens offered women in enclosed settings occasions to enact "virtual pilgrimages" to Jerusalem, the accumulation of Holy Land relics incorporated into the objects pointing to real spaces while also invoking mythic holy places.[28] Briefly, *Enclosed Garden with Calvary Group* demonstrates that figural representation and relics work together to invoke the Holy Land and the narrative events of the bible (Figure 2). Most prominently, a statuette representing the Crucifixion of Christ appears at the center of the object. The attendant network of relics around Christ reiterates the location of Christ's suffering. Beneath Christ, authenticating parchments identify dirt relics from Mount Olive and anchor the scene in Palestine. There, critical events from Christ's life and beyond occurred in gardens and featured women. Along with summoning the Crucifixion, *Enclosed Garden with Calvary Group* creates a space for virtual pilgrimages to gardens featured in biblical scenes, including the Fall of Man, the Annunciation, and *Noli Me Tangere* in which Christ appeared to Mary Magdalene in the avatar of a gardener.

Rudy understands Enclosed Gardens as having permitted users to engage in pilgrimage experiences to certified simulacra of real sites. Although the Hospital Sisters experienced contact with lay people and conducted a fair amount of their lives outside the convent, the sisters were nevertheless deprived of the experience of physical pilgrimages. Rudy argues that gender dynamics played little part in the dearth of religious women undertaking physical pilgrimage: rather, "poverty and enclosure" prevented religious women from long journeys.[29] However, this paper contends that the vows limiting the mobility of religious women ultimately derived from and were enforced by male-dominated institutions. Thus restricted, religious women experienced pilgrimage remotely through text and image. With tangible traces of sites present in the relics, Enclosed Gardens brought the topography of physical pilgrimage into more accessible virtual spaces.

In addition to the visualization techniques Rudy describes as inducing virtual pilgrimage, there perhaps exists

sity of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 143-58. See also Caroline Walker-Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982).

23 Hamburger, "'In the Image and Likeness of God:' Pictorial Reflections on Images and the 'Imago Dei,'" in *Femmes, Art et Religion Au Moyen Âge*, ed. Jean-Claude Schmitt (Strasbourg; Colmar: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg; Musée d'Unterlinden, 2004), 1-18; Hamburger, *Visual and the Visionary;* and Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists*, 218-219 and 221.

24 Falkenberg cites a genre of manuscript texts with garden imagery that actualize the devotional exercises deriving from love spirituality. I argue that Enclosed Gardens also contain evidence of love spirituality. See Falkenburg, *Fruit of Devotion*; Falkenburg, "The Scent of Holyness."

25 Baert, "Echoes of Liminal Spaces;" Baert, "Late Medieval Enclosed Gardens" (IKKM).

26 In addition to the list of sources contained within this footnote, Peeters (Leuven, Belgium) plans to publish Baert's *Late Medieval Enclosed Gardens of the Low Countries: Contributions to Gender and Artistic Expression* in 2016. Otherwise, see: Baert, "The Gaze in the Garden," 14-39; "Echoes of Liminal Spaces;" and "Late Medieval Enclosed Gardens" (IKKM).

27 Paul Vandenbroeck, "The Energetics of the Unknowable Body," in *Backlit Heaven: Power and Devotion in the Archdiocese Mechelen* (Tielt, Belgium: MMMechelen vzw, 2009), 174-204; and Baert, "Echoes of Liminal Spaces."

28 Rudy, *Virtual Pilgrimages*; and Rudy, "Virtual Pilgrimages Through the Jerusalem Cityscapes," in *Visual Constructs of Jerusalem* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2014), 381-93.

29 See Rudy, *Virtual Pilgrimages,* 28.

an additional way to think about the relationship between Enclosed Gardens and virtual pilgrimage. This paper asks: could pilgrimage be activated through the haptics of making? Medieval love spirituality ultimately envisioned bodies united as one, and labor around sacred objects offered the possibility of generating the desired condition of in-betweenness encapsulated in the *unio mystica*. Although represented by distinct hetero-normative bodies, the *unio mystica* envisions a collapse of boundaries between bodies. Enclosed Gardens offered direct contact with heavenly bodies through relics, a contact especially intimate for makers of the objects. Think of the tiny moments of making, of holding bones, handling dirt, threading together reliquary *ampulla*. Although monotonous, the act of touching remnants of holy bodies and detritus of sacred places endowed otherwise mundane moments with immanence.

The material instability of craftwork subjects such entities to ongoing modification. Accordingly, the seven surviving Enclosed Gardens belonging to the Mechelen Hospital Sisters are currently undergoing a program of conservation, repeating past actions of making and maintenance.[30] That this making and maintenance endures across the lifespan of these objects imbues Enclosed Gardens with the state of emergence—a permanent state of becoming. As the contemporary world continues the work of the Mechelen Hospital Sisters, Enclosed Gardens defer completeness for in-betweenness, a condition paralleling Elizabeth Grosz's conception of utopia.[31] Distinct from historical notions of utopia grounded in secure spatialities and enforceable systems of social organization, Grosz's utopia deals in the unknown. Although ultimately only ever an imaginary thought space, utopia as described by Grosz haunts cultural production.

The making and re-making of Enclosed Gardens negotiates conditions of power, conditions that also shaped the socio-cultural environment originally producing the object. Political and social organizations form the physical world, a space that Grosz terms "the real." Grosz contends that such systems derive from phallocentric structures. Phallocentrism relies upon oppositional terms such as the male/female binary to maintain hegemony. A similar illusion characterizes the production of culture. Reliant upon secure meanings and complete forms, phallocentric objects reinforce distinctions between and throughout bodies, and equate the fixed occupation of space with power. Anything excessive is described as maternal-feminine. Profoundly excessive in both material and meaning, Enclosed Gardens contest such conceptions of culture and propose an alternative—culture as incomplete.

Although displaying the possibility of a utopia, frames delimit Enclosed Gardens and their wings, folded inwards, protect an unstable materiality. Nevertheless, material culture such as Enclosed Gardens demonstrates that, within enclosure, the Hospital Sisters recognized the world as a process rather than a state. Responding to and working within the conditions of enclosure, the Hospital Sisters built inquisitive process into the functionality of their material culture.

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[30] For more information on the restoration and exhibition of the Mechelen Enclosed Gardens, visit: http://muse.mechelen.be/besloten-hofjes; and http://www.illuminare.be/enclosed-gardens-municipal-museums-mechelen/.

[31] Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside*.

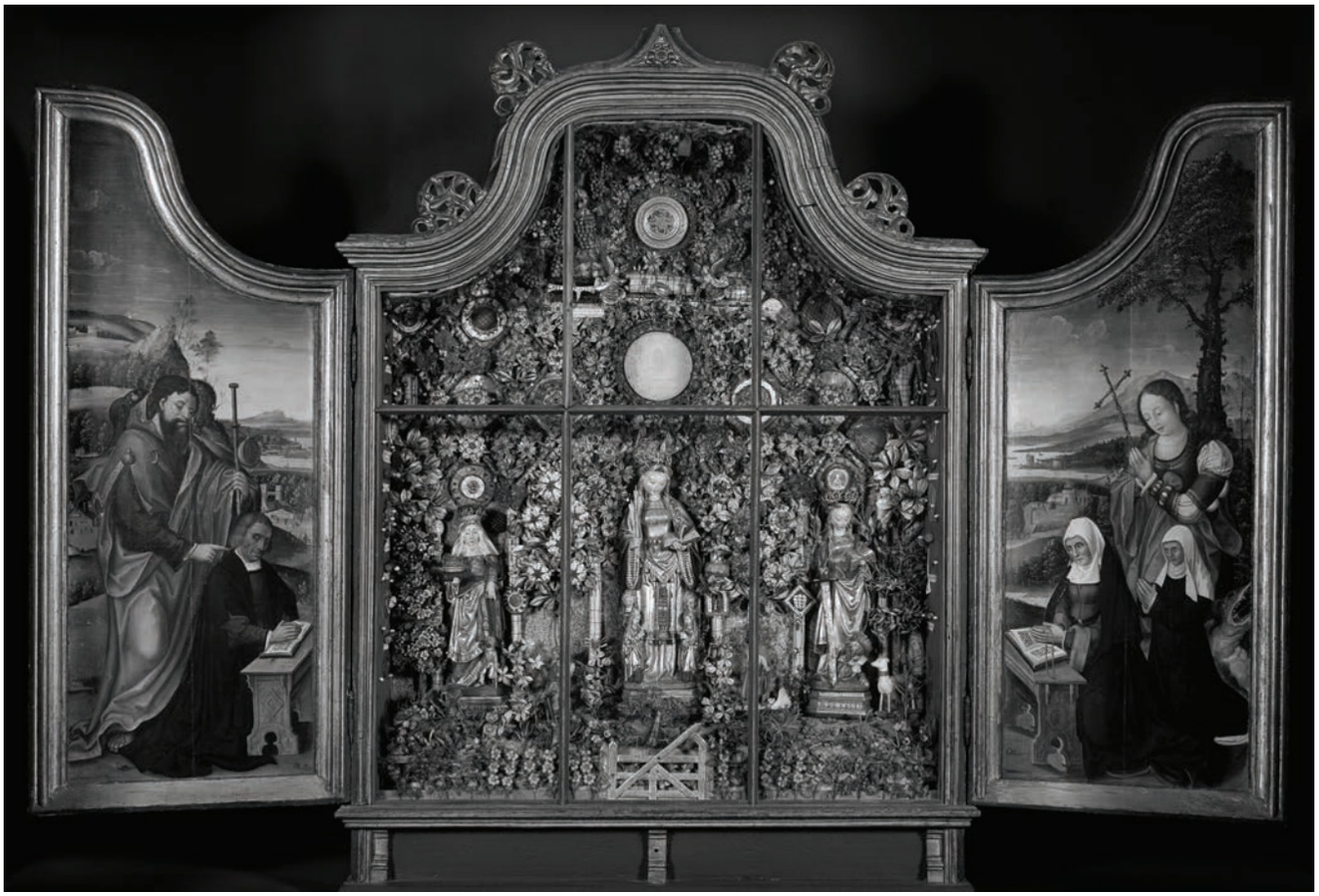

Figure 1. Mechelen Workshop, *Enclosed Garden with Saints Elisabeth, Ursula, and Catherine*, *c.* 1525, 134.5 x 97.5 x 22.2 cm (dimensions of central cabinet). Courtesy of Mechelen Museums.

Figure 2. Mechelen Workshop, *Enclosed Garden with Calvary Group (Christ Crucified, the Holy Virgin, and St. John the Baptist)*, c. 1525. Courtesy of Mechelen Museums.