

Reliquary Goat

This is a very small piece of a much larger project. The much larger project is an entire reliquary shrine (complete with statues) in the style of the existing Besloten Hofje (Low Countries 1480-1550) and is about 75% complete at this time.

This small part is a goat. I had wanted to try an animal for the shrine for a very long time because most of the existing shrines contain at least one bird or animal. But I needed to figure out the many different flower types before I could set my mind to the animals.

I liked the looks of the goat the best so I thought to start the menagerie with a goat. For documentation I am using the goat from the shrine at Kalkar (1500) and the Sheep from the shrines at Kloster Bentlage in Rheine (1520). I have personally seen both these examples. This is the goat:



And these are the sheep:



From my research I can make some general statements about the items in the shrines:

- They were constructed with silk thread or fabric.
- The flowers were constructed using a combination of wire and vellum.
- There is a great deal of variety in flower types and shapes but all use the same basic techniques.
- The techniques used for animals are similar, but not the same, as the flower techniques.

I conversed with two museum curators in charge of restoration on Besloten Hofjes. Neither knew the base of the animal constructions so I decided to go with what I know and what I could observe. About all I could decipher from looking at the extant examples was that they had wire legs and were wrapped in a fabric, trim, or fringe. The goat has ears and horns that look exactly like some flower parts so I felt confident that I could reproduce those parts.

I used deer vellum as the base of the body. Deer vellum is very thick in relation to the other animal hides I had available and I didn't really have a use for it except in construction of three-dimensional objects. All vellum can be shaped when it is wet so I soaked the deer vellum in water for about ten minutes and then rolled it up and secured it in a Z like shape with a rubber band until it was totally dry. After removing the rubber band I twisted up some wire for legs. It now had a goat-like shape and at an acceptable size for the shrine.



The next step was to create a fringe for the goat hair. I created a stick that was H shaped and wrapped it in the same way one would do to make tassels (very short tassels) and sewed the fringe and trimmed it.

Future wrappings, because it took a lot more than I thought it would, I sewed up both sides, top and bottom, because the original fringe was longer than I needed and trimming it would cause a great deal of waste. Wrapping these fringe lengths around the vellum was problematic because there was no way to secure the fringe to the vellum! I then removed the fringe, wrapped the vellum with silk fabric scraps in as close of a color match as I had available and then stitched the fringe to the fabric. This seemed to work very well but did make the goat a little larger than I originally intended. I then secured light-weight vellum to the legs and wrapped the legs with silk as well.



After wrapping the legs I created the horns and ears and sewed little black beads on for eyes. I don't remember seeing eyes on any of the sheep or goats but mine turned out very furry and really needed eyes in my opinion. Beads were used as accents on many of the flowers in the shrines, most notably in the Geel shrine (1501-1525).

I was going to trim my goat but then an amazing thing happened; the remains of an actual saint (St. Maria Goretti) toured the U.S.A. and stopped in my area. I took the goat when I went to see the saint and turned my goat into a third class relic. (In the Catholic church a first class relic is the saint, a second class relic is something the saint owned, used, or was tortured with, and a third class relic is something that has touched a first or second class relic. In this case the goat touched the glass case that enclosed the saint.) Trimming it at this point would seem wrong.

Wrapped and completed. Additional resources at <http://www.roxelana.com/new/silke>

