Class Objectives
In this class you will learn to:
- identify several styles of German women's purses/pouches from 1500-1550
- understand the tools and techniques used to make purses/pouches
- identify the materials used to create these accessories
- understand the basics of purse/pouch-making

Overview
There are not many extant purses remaining from the early 16th century in Germany for working-class women. Purses were used by the working class, not created and put aside for safe-keeping, and thus most did not survive. We do have a lot of pictorial evidence in the four volume set of Single-Leaf German Woodcuts.

German Women's Purses 1500-1550
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Race for Purses
This woodcut shows young girls in a footrace at a country fair. Two of the prizes are purses.

Extant Purses

The odd thing about researching German purses is that the pictoral evidence shows one type of purse. The surviving purses in the museums show different-looking purses, most noticeable ring purses as shown by the two on the far left and the purse below.
Materials
Thread - Waxed linen.
Cloth - Velvet
Button - Wooden or antler

Tools
Awl - Use for punching holes in leather before you hand-stitch the pieces together.
Needle - For hand-stitching leather together.
Notes: Don't use glovers needles. They are very sharp and unnecessary.

Goldilocks Experiment for Leather Purses
In Purses in Pieces seems to be the gold standard in documentation for German-style purses. In the book, the author states that the leather is ______. However, leather that thin would seem to not hold its shape very well.

I have experimented with different types of hides to see what works best. I call it the Goldilocks experiment. Making an entire pouch out of cow hide resulted in a bag that was too stiff. It did not look like the woodcut.

The purse that I made from deer hide looked more like the woodcut, but the belt loop was too stretchy. It would likely not last very long holding a weighted purse.

Finally, I made a pouch with a cow hide back for strength in the belt look and a deer hide front which gave the pouch a more authentic look.

Purse #1: Simple Leather Purse with one Pouchlet

A leather purse with a single pouchlet is the most simple pattern for a leather pouch.

Materials - Cow hide for back, deer hide for pouchlet, waxed linen, rubber cement
Tools - awl, needle

All leather pouches are a variation on this theme. A good youtube video on leather stitching is: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uRxMHPs6kJMw&feature=related

1. Cut out your pattern pieces. In this example, there is a back, front and one pouchlet.
2. Glue the pouchlet to the leather with rubber cement to hold it into place.
3. Punch a hole through the leather with an awl (one hole at a time).
4. Thread a piece of waxed linen with two needles, one on either end.
5. Stitch through the holes in the leather.

The pouch below is sewn with two needles on a single pieces of waxed linen.


6. Make your next hole with the awl. Sew the thread through the hole twice, one needle coming from one direction, the other needle from the other direction.
7. Repeat the sewing steps above until the pouchlet is attached to the bag.
8. Attach the pouch front to pouch back with rubber cement.
9. Stitch the back to the front in the same method as described above.
10. When the front and back are sewn together, bend the beltloop forward and glue it in place.
11. Sew the beltloop in place.
12. Add a button to the bag.
13. Cut a hole in the "lid" for the button.

You have completed your German leather purse. Most simple purses can be made in this way, varying the number of pouchlets on the front.

Purse #2: Round Velvet Purse with Buttonholes

The round purse is simple construction but the amount of buttonholes is somewhat time-consuming.

Cut the pattern pieces
1. Cut a circle of velvet and a circle of lining.
2. Cut 1 circle of plastic canvas for the middle.
3. Cut the pouches and lining.

Prepare for Sewing
1. Fold the velvet in half.
2. Measure 3/4" from the edge and mark for eyelets.
3. Flip over and make eyelets mark on the other side.
4. Make eyelets in the bag.

Mark the center circle for the plastic purse bottom insert.
1. On the lining, find the center.
2. Mark around the plastic insert. You'll need this sewing line when you insert the plastic purse bottom later.

Sew together
1. Sew the two large circles together, wrong side to wrong side, leaving a gap wide enough for the plastic purse bottom to fit through.
2. Turn and press.
3. Insert the piece of plastic canvas.
4. Sew around the plastic canvas to hold in place.

Make casing for drawstring
1. Sew around the edge 1/4" from the edge. Sew around 1 1/4" from the edge.

Prepare the pouchlets
1. Sew the velvet and lining together, right sides to right side, leaving a gap for turning.
2. Turn and press.
3. Slip stitch the opening closed.
4. Mark the top edge for eyelets for lacing.
5. Make the eyelets.

Sew the pouchlets to the purse
1. For whatever number of pouchlets you have, measure on the body where you want them to go.
2. Make two eyelets in the body for the drawstrings for each pouchlet.
3. Pin the pouchlets to the purse.
4. Sew in place.

Thread the drawstrings through the pouchlets and the purse.

You're done!
Purse #3: Velvet Bag on a Frame

The fabric bags are sometimes shown with smocking, just as you would see in the collars and cuffs of German shirts. The purses made from velvet are made using cotton velvet, not the rayon variety.

**Materials** - Purse frame (half round, square), velvet, lining, thread  
**Tools** - Pins, scissors, needle

1. Determine the width of fabric that you need to gather into a smocked body in the final purse.  
2. Cut a rectangle.  
3. On the back side, make a series of dots that you will gather.  
4. Gather the pleats together.  
5. Use smocking stitches to make a pattern on the pleats OR just use a backstitch to hold the pleats in place.
6. Prepare your pouchlets.
7. Make two eyelets for each pouchlet on the purse body.
8. Add the pouchlets.
9. Line the front and back pieces with lining.
10. Sew the right sides to right side, leaving a gap for turning.
11. Turn and press.
12. Sew the front and back together leaving the top open for the purse.
13. Insert the purse frame.
14. Sew the bag to the purse frame.
15. Sew a loop on the back of the purse and you're done!
Bibliography


Sources