The Cabinet of Wonders of Rudolf II, Holy Roman Emperor

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Lecture summary:

Rudolf II (18 July 1552 – 20 January 1612) was the ruler of the Holy Roman Empire (1576–1612), which covered much of Central Europe. He has long been acknowledged as a great and influential patron of the arts and sciences, and yet, some mystery surrounds his intentions. During his lifetime he was censured for devoting too much of his energy to his collection, and too little to his duties as Emperor. His accusers charged him with madness and mania, yet we may ask, was there more to his collecting than personal obsession?

This lecture will delve into Rudolf II’s Kunstкамmer (art collection) to consider whether the wonders of art found inside connect with his ambitions as Emperor. Precious and rare objects forged by the greatest artists of the age were assembled alongside some of the most curious paintings of the early modern period – assemblages of objects constructed to form great heads representing the Seasons and Elements. Was this vast collection the treasury of madman, or did it amount to something more than its individual parts may suggest?

Slide list:

2. Adriaen de Vries, *Rudolf II introducing the Liberal Arts to Bohemia*, 1609, Bronze, 59.4 x 84.3 x 13.0 cm, Royal Collection, London.
3. Aegidius Sadeler, *Rudolf II as a Triumphant General*, Print after de Vries, c.1600
4. Titian, *Equestrian Portrait of Charles V*, 1548, oil on canvas, 335 cm × 283 cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid.
5. * Giuseppe Arcimboldo (ca. 1527-1593), *Portrait of Rudolf II as Vertumnus*, 1590. Oil on panel. 70.5 x 57.5 cm, Skokloster Castle, Sweden.
9. Hoffmann, Hans, *Hare among plants in a forest clearing*, 1585, oil on panel, 62.2 x 78.4 cm, Getty Museum, Los Angeles.
10. Albrecht Dürer, *Young Hare*, 1502, Engraving, 25 cm x 23 cm, Albertina, Vienna.
11. Giuseppe Arcimboldo, *Seasons Series*, (Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter), 1563-1573, Oil on canvas, approx. 76x64 cm, Louvre, Paris. (Other versions of these works are collected elsewhere).
12. Giuseppe Arcimboldo, *Elements Series*, (Earth, Air, Water, Fire) c.1566, Oil on canvas, 67 x 51 cm, Kunsthistorisches, Museum, Vienna (Other versions of these works are collected elsewhere).

References: