

Abstract:

In 1571, Arcimboldo organized a festive procession for the wedding of Maria of Bavaria and Charles of Styria, in which representatives of the four continents as well as personifications of the seasons and the elements came forward to establish the Habsburgs as their rulers.

Within this context, the question arises to what extent the theme of empire ruled by the Habsburgs across continents is also related to Arcimboldo's paintings of composite heads of the seasons and elements. The thesis thus maps the vast field of visual culture of Habsburg representation, in which the theme of global empire resonates, and which includes various festivals as well as imperial *kunstkammer* and *menagerie*.

An important role was played by representatives of exotic flora and fauna, which were representative symbols of the territories the Habsburg ruled and which, in the second half of the 16th century, became associated with the personification of the continents as their characteristic attributes. The thesis concludes that this visual language is also continued by Arcimboldo in his allegories, in which he elevates the Habsburgs to rulers of the whole world.