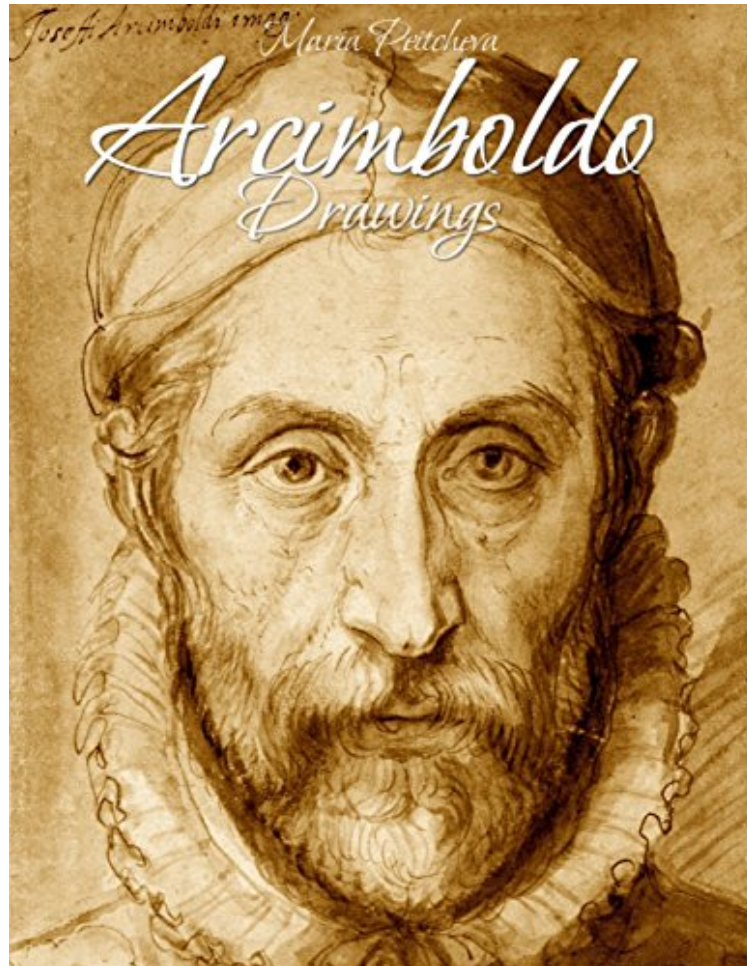



Arcimboldo: Drawings

Maria Peitcheva

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Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1526 ndash; 1593) was an Italian painter best known for creating imaginative portrait heads made entirely of objects such as fruits, vegetables, flowers, fish, and books. Giuseppe's father, Biagio Arcimboldo, was an artist of Milan. Like his father, Giuseppe Arcimboldo started his career as a designer for stained glass and frescoes at local cathedrals when he was 21 years old. In 1562, he became court portraitist to Ferdinand I at the Habsburg court in Vienna, and later, to Maximilian II and his son Rudolf II at the court in Prague. He was also the court decorator and costume designer. Augustus, Elector of Saxony, who visited Vienna in 1570 and 1573, saw Arcimboldo's work and commissioned a copy of his "The Four Seasons" which incorporates his own monarchic symbols. Arcimboldo's conventional work, on traditional religious subjects, has fallen into oblivion, but his portraits of human heads made up

of vegetables, plants, fruits, sea creatures and tree roots, were greatly admired by his contemporaries and remain a source of fascination today. At a distance, his portraits looked like normal human portraits. However, individual objects in each portrait were actually overlapped together to make various anatomical shapes of a human. They were carefully constructed by his imagination. Besides, when he assembled objects in one portrait, he never used random objects. Each object was related by characterization. By using everyday objects, the portraits were decoration and still-life paintings at the same time. His works showed not only nature and human beings, but also how closely they were related. Arcimboldo died in Milan, where he had retired after leaving the Prague service. It was during this last phase of his career that he produced the composite portrait of Rudolph II, as well as his self-portrait as the Four Seasons. His Italian contemporaries honoured him with poetry and manuscripts celebrating his illustrious career. When the Swedish army invaded Prague in 1648, during the Thirty Years' War, many of Arcimboldo's paintings were taken from Rudolf's II collection. Arcimboldo is known as a 16th-century Mannerist. A transitional period from 1520 to 1590, Mannerism adopted some artistic elements from the High Renaissance and influenced other elements in the Baroque period. A Mannerist tended to show close relationships between human and nature. His works can be found in Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum and the Habsburg Schloss Ambras in Innsbruck; the Louvre in Paris; as well as in numerous museums in Sweden. In Italy, his work is in Cremona, Brescia, and the Uffizi Gallery in Florence.