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*Kaiser Ebersdorf  
Maximilian II's Pleasure Palace and Exotic Menagerie in Vienna*

Giuseppe Arcimboldo, *Terra*, Vienna, 1563



For close to three years, the Habsburg Archduke Maximilian, later Emperor Maximilian II, spent several pivotal years at the Spanish court, ruling as Regent of Spain. The magnificent gardens he witnessed in Spain left an indelible mark upon him. He was entranced by the exotic plants, seeds, flowers, and wild animals imported to Spain from overseas, and after his return to Austria in 1551, he set about to realize his dream of a *villa suburbana* with an exotic menagerie, just outside of Vienna.

Novel fauna and flora became an integral part of Habsburg collections in Central Europe, reflecting an owner's mastery and dominion over territorial spaces geographically far removed from Europe. The novelty of collecting exotic pets, such as simians and colorful parrots from Africa and Brazil, and Asian elephants, especially fascinated Maximilian II, whose viewed his menagerie as an extension of his *Kunstkammer* outdoors, and where court artists, like Giuseppe Arcimboldo, drew these wild beasts from life.

This paper will look at a series of unpublished letters in the Haus, Hof,- und Staatsarchiv in Vienna, personally compiled by Maximilian II himself, which outline his dedication to creating the most surprising and startling pleasure palace, garden and menagerie ever seen in his territories. His menagerie at Kaiser Ebersdorf, not only housed the first Asian elephant ever seen in Austria - the renowned Süleyman -, but also the first plants and flowers imported from Florida: the American sunflower and the therapeutic shrub, sassafras.