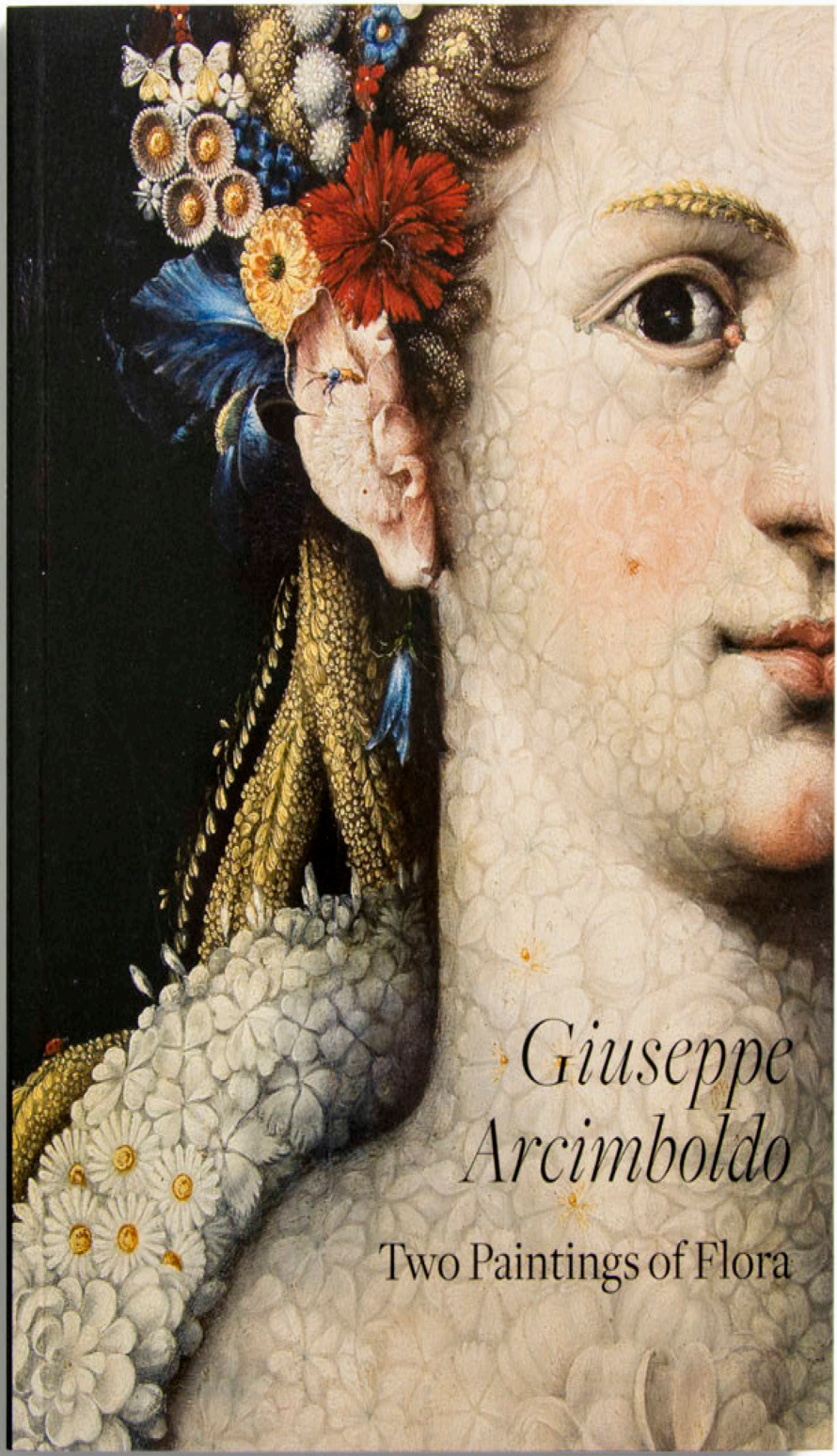
GIUSEPPE ARCIMBOLDO
TWO PAINTINGS OF FLORA

2014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Two Paintings of Flora

With texts by Miguel Falomir,
Lynn Roberts and Paul Mitchell

Madrid, 2014

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Giuseppe Arcimboldo
Two Paintings of Flora

Fundación Juan March, Madrid
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Preface

This publication accompanies the exhibition *Giuseppe Arcimboldo. Two Paintings of Flora*, which is the first public display of two magnificent oils on panel by the Italian artist Arcimboldo, one dating from 1589 and the other from around 1590. Both come from private collections and although they are referred to in the relevant literature they have not been included in the most recent major exhibitions on the artist.

The imagination and ingeniousness that characterise the work of Arcimboldo, a painter in demand from emperors and praised by intellectuals and poets, fascinated his contemporaries but, as Miguel Falomir points out in his essay, after his death Arcimboldo's work fell into an obscurity from which it was rescued only in the 1930s when Alfred H. Barr Jr, the founder and first director of the MoMA in New York, championed him as a forerunner of the Surrealists and Dadaists and showed his work alongside theirs in the celebrated exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (1936–37). Since then, art historians and experts have rediscovered Arcimboldo's highly individual style, elevating him to the rank of one of the great sixteenth-century artists.

Flora and *Flora meretrix*, the works in this exhibition, were celebrated as masterpieces in their own time. They are two examples of the so-called *teste composte*, or "composite heads", painted by Arcimboldo with the exceptional virtuosity of a miniaturist and one possessed of a detailed scientific knowledge of flora and fauna. The artist created these two heads and busts from flowers, small animals and other natural elements, carefully chosen and relating to the subject depicted but recognisable only when seen close up. The "Floras" in the exhibition respectively represent the two traditions that derived from the myth of Chloris: made pregnant by the wind god Zephyr, she turned into the nymph Flora and brought colour to a previously monochrome world. The two Floras are thus the nymph Flora, the embodiment of spring and a symbol of harmony and nature's fecundity, and the worldly, sensual Flora meretrix.

The paintings' present frames were designed by the eminent Italian art historian Federico Zeri (1921–98) who made use of the traditional technique of *pietre dure*, which was widely employed at the time of Arcimboldo. The rich colours emphasise and echo those in the paintings.

The Fundación Juan March would like to thank the owners of these works for their generous loan. Our thanks equally go to Miguel Falomir, Head of the Department of Italian and French Painting (up to 1700) at the Museo Nacional del Prado and author of the catalogue's principal essay. We also thank Lynn Roberts and Paul Mitchell for their text about the frames of these paintings.

Madrid, January 2014
FUNDACIÓN JUAN MARCH

Arcimboldo and Flora

MIGUEL FALOMIR

Fundación Juan March

Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1526–1593) is one of the most surprising cases of changing fortunes in the world of art. Esteemed and ennobled by emperors and praised by renowned writers on art of the day, after his death he was the subject of a harsh *damnatio memoriae* that lasted until the twentieth century, at which point he suddenly reappeared, becoming one of the few visual artists prior to the Impressionists capable of connecting with the modern sensibility.[1] Arcimboldo emerged from his critical ostracism in the 1930s when art historian Alfred H. Barr Jr described him as a forerunner of the Dadaists and Surrealists in the exhibition he curated in 1936–37 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, entitled *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*. In the 1950s Arcimboldo made a triumphant return to the Western artistic canon, with numerous scholarly publications[2] and the recognition of intellectuals such as Roland Barthes (1915–80),[3] who used his theory of linguistic semiotics to discover fascinating analogies between rhetorical concepts such as metonymy and paradox and Arcimboldo's complex images. The rediscovery of the artist, who came to be seen as the quintessence of a Mannerism synonymous with caprice and eccentricity, reached its height in 1987 with another exhibition, *Effetto Arcimboldo. Transformations of the Face from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries*, held at the Palazzo Grassi in Venice and dedicated, significantly, to Alfred H. Barr Jr: "who, fifty years ago, introduced Giuseppe Arcimboldo into the history of modern art". While that exhibition was notably criticised by specialists such as Federico Zeri (1921–1998), who considered the catalogue to be full of "divagazioni a base letteraria o pseudostoricistica",[4] it was an enormous success with the public and fully established Arcimboldo as the fantastical, irrational artist championed by the avant-garde. The artist's prestige has continued to grow ever since but the perception of him has notably changed: moving from that of an individualistic, eccentric artist to one fully in harmony with his own time, a fact that has provided the key to an understanding of his works. The result of this endeavour to locate the artist in his cultural context has been the appearance of an Arcimboldo interested in the natural sciences and even a precursor of the genre of still life, which would reach its peak a few years after his death in the work of his fellow Italian Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. Once

Fig. 1
Giuseppe Arcimboldo, *Self-portrait*, 1571–76. Drawing in brush, blue watercolour on paper; 230 x 157 mm. National Gallery, Prague

again, an exhibition took place that established this new vision of the artist, entitled *Arcimboldo: 1526–1593*, held in Vienna (Kunsthistorisches Museum) and Paris (Musée du Luxembourg) in 2007–8.[5]

Arcimboldo was born in Milan in 1526 into a family of painters, a modest social background, which he embellished after he was knighted by the emperor, Rudolf II (1552–1612), in 1580 by stating that he came from a noble family from Lombardy of the same name. The artist probably trained with his father Biaggio and his uncle Ambrogio, both artists close to Bernardino Luini (1482–1532), a pupil of Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519). Like his father, Arcimboldo worked primarily for the Opera del Duomo, Florence, where he is documented between 1549 and 1558 as a designer of cartoons for stained glass and tapestries. He also painted frescoes in the cathedral of nearby Monza.[6] In 1562 his life changed radically when he was invited to the imperial court by the future Maximilian II (reigned 1564–1576), who was at that point heir to the throne of his father Ferdinand I (1503–1564, emperor from 1558). Arcimboldo's principal activity during his early years of royal service was portraiture. No documented portrait survives, however, and his contribution to the genre thus continues to be a *campo aperto* (open question).[7] The portraits attributed to him are certainly not masterpieces, comprising mechanical and soulless versions of the type of formal court portraiture developed by Titian (1485–1576) and Anthonis Mor (1517–1576) in the mid-sixteenth century. The only authenticated portrait by Arcimboldo is his *Self-portrait* (National Gallery, Prague), a blue watercolour from around 1571–76, in which the artist, depicted frontally, presents himself as elegant and slightly melancholy [Fig. 1]. In the 1570s Arcimboldo was also employed to design the numerous spectacles (tournaments, plays, weddings) that were held at court, an activity known from 158 signed drawings in the Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi in Florence. Offered to Rudolf II in 1585, this portfolio indicates both the versatility of this multi-talented artist and the wide range of projects he undertook at court, given that it also includes drawings for masques and designs for fountains and sleighs. This dual employment as portraitist and designer of temporary events has been compared to Leonardo's output for the Sforza court in Milan.[8] Arcimboldo remained at the imperial court until 1587, first in Vienna then in Prague, although he returned to Milan in 1566 and 1581 and probably also from 1576 to 1577. In 1587 he left the court, garlanded with honours, and returned to Milan where he died in 1593, aged sixty-six.

A multi-faceted artist, Arcimboldo's place in history rests on one aspect of his output, which is as unique as is it indelibly linked with his name: his so-called *teste composte* (composite heads). The term refers to a composition arising from the combination of different, clearly definable elements to form a head and the upper part of a bust. While these

heads have often been described as caprices resulting from the artist's whimsical and fertile imagination, their creation was in fact a complex issue bound by specific rules. Arcimboldo never grouped the items in a random way and his composite heads are always thematic, featuring elements associated with the subject represented. Thus, in his celebrated *Seasons*, of which there are several versions, he incorporated plants and fruit characteristic of each time of the year, while in the *Elements* he made use of terrestrial animals for *Earth* [Fig. 2] and sea creatures for *Water*. In addition, the heads had to look like heads, obliging the artist to connect the various elements in a precise manner in order to obtain a sense of lifelikeness. Not all animals or fruits, for example, could be used to suggest the neck, nose or hair, and a close examination of these paintings reveals Arcimboldo's considerable knowledge of anatomy.

A telling indication that these creations by the artist were not the result of his eccentricity but rather relate to the artistic culture of his time is offered by Gregorio Comanini in *Il Figino, overo del fine della pittura* (The Figino, or, On the purpose of painting), a treatise on art published in Mantua in 1591 in which the author states that the ultimate aim of painting is imitation, albeit distinguishing two types: the "icastic", consisting of the imitation of nature as it appears before our eyes; and the "fantastic", which generates images produced by man's imagination. Despite being fantastic, Comanini continues, the images consist of elements that accurately reproduce reality, even though they are deprived of their normal context and used in an unexpected manner. It is thus not surprising that Comanini concludes his argument by declaring Arcimboldo to be the greatest exponent of this type of fantastic imitation:

> [...] so, combining the forms of the visible things that he observed, he creates strange caprices and images from them that are no longer the product of the imagination's invention, everything that seems impossible to bring together, piling them up with great skill and succeeding in making his intention emerge from them.[9]

Within Arcimboldo's oeuvre, Comanini singled out *Flora* [Cat. 1], present in this exhibition, and *Vertumnus*, with which it formed a pair [Fig. 3], as the perfect expression of the notion of "fantastic imitation".[10]

The origins of the *teste composte* have been the subject of discussion by all those who have studied the artist, giving rise to remote and unlikely suggestions including Mughal miniatures. Two theories now tend to prevail. The first, proposed by Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, is that these works are the product of the sophisticated imperial court. As such, they are "serious jokes" designed with the collaboration of humanists; an intelligent combination of the serious and humorous that could provoke

Fig. 2
Giuseppe Arcimboldo,
Earth, 1566. Oil on panel;
70.2 x 48.7 cm. Private
collection, Vienna

Fig. 3
Giuseppe Arcimboldo,
Vertumnus, 1591.
Oil on panel; 58 x 70 cm.
Skokloster Castle, Sweden

a smile but which were at the same time the bearers of poetic, political and philosophical notions, in line with the type of interpretation promoted by Erasmus of Rotterdam in his influential *In Praise of Folly* (1511). This theory is supported by the fact that the earliest *teste composte* are dated 1563, a year after Arcimboldo's arrival at court.[11] Opposing this erudite, central European origin, Francesco Porzio has placed greater emphasis on the heads' grotesqueness, which he sees as indebted to popular Milanese tradition manifested in the masks worn for country festivals and for Carnival and which equally inspired comic literature of the day. He also argues that Arcimboldo's earliest composite heads are the *Seasons* in Munich (Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen), which he dates between 1555 and 1560 and thus prior to the artist's arrival at court. This theory corroborates Arcimboldo's contemporary Paolo Morigi, who said that the artist produced them before entering the emperor's service.[12]

Both DaCosta Kauffman and Porzio acknowledge the influence of Leonardo in two aspects: as the creator of the *teste grotesche e di carattere* (grotesque heads and heads of characters) and for his scientific approach to nature. Milan was the city that best preserved the artist's legacy. Until his death in 1570 it was the home of Francesco Melzi, who inherited Leonardo's drawings and writings, while it was also the city where Leonardo's pupil Luini was based. As noted earlier, Arcimboldo's father and uncle worked with Luini and we thus have to assume that he was familiar with Leonardo's ideas. It was in this context that Melzi assembled Leonardo's observations in the form of the *Treatise on Painting* (first published in Paris in 1651). In the section headed "How to make an imaginary animal seem natural", Leonardo offers a precise description of a composite head:

> You know that you cannot invent animals without limbs, each of which, in itself, must resemble those of some other animal. Hence if you wish to make an animal, imagined by you, appear natural – let us say a Dragon, take for its head that of a mastiff or hound, with the eyes of a cat, the ears of a porcupine, the nose of a greyhound, the brow of a lion, the temples of an old cock, the neck of a water tortoise.[13]

Whatever their origin, and even if Arcimboldo did not invent the idea, the *teste composte* had a notable impact on his contemporaries, who looked to antiquity for painters with whom to compare his creations. In 1568 Giambattista Fonteo, a Milanese humanist in the service of Rudolf II, who collaborated with Arcimboldo between 1568 and 1572, praised him as the painter of *grilli* and chimeras. The word *grillo* derives from Pliny the Elder and his Book XXXV of his *Natural History* (chapter 37), in which he refers to the Greek painter Antiphilus, who painted an individual known as Gryllus wearing an absurd outfit.[14] *Grillo* thus became a synonym for ridiculous or bizarre painting. It was used in this way by numerous

Renaissance writers, who gave this name to various contemporary artists, for example, Gian Paolo Lomazzo writing on Polidoro da Caravaggio and Felipe de Guevara on Hieronymous Bosch (ca. 1450–1516).[15] Other parallels with classical painters are equally pertinent, particularly if we bear in mind the two paintings of Flora in this exhibition. Remaining with Pliny, in a later paragraph (*Natural History*, XXXV, chapter 40) he briefly describes the mid-fourth century BC Greek painter Pausias from Sicyon and his beloved Glycera. The story was retold in 1560 by De Guevara in his *Comentarios de la pintura*:

> As a young man he was in love with Glycera, from his home town, who invented the floral wreath, and competing with her in imitation, he applied the art of Painting to a great variety of Flowers, finally painting her seated and wearing a wreath of flowers, which is one of the noblest paintings that he executed.[16]

The portrait of Glycera is of dual importance in this context. Firstly, it endows the painting of flowers and its association with human figures with the irrefutable authority of the classical writers, and secondly it reveals that a painting with these characteristics could be celebrated as a great work of art, thus countering the prevailing prejudice against this genre in contemporary art theory, which tended to relegate such works to a lowly category.

Continuing with the two paintings that comprise this exhibition, *Flora* was celebrated from the moment of its creation as one of Arcimboldo's masterpieces. Together with *Vertumnus*, it was the work that most contributed to disseminating his skills. This was not by chance. Aside from its extremely high quality, *Flora* exemplifies the artist's skill for self-promotion, an undertaking in which the collaboration of intellectuals was fundamental, as he must have learned at court. It was painted after Arcimboldo's permanent return to Milan in 1587, having received titles and honours from Rudolf II for his tireless service and from whom he received a lifetime pension. Arcimboldo returned his patron's generosity by sending him paintings. The first was *Flora*, executed in 1589 and presented to Rudolf on New Year's Day in 1590, a date on which the ruler traditionally received presents. The choice of this painting as a gift for the emperor can be explained by Rudolf's interest in botany and gardening, an enthusiasm that Arcimboldo would again reflect two years later with *Vertumnus*, which formed a pair with *Flora*.[17] *Vertumnus* is an allegorical portrait of Rudolf, who is compared to the god of change and nature, presented as the supreme gardener who brings order to the seasons and the cycle of life. As DaCosta Kaufmann noted, by identifying himself with Vertumnus, a god associated with Jupiter, Rudolf established a precise metaphor of the Habsburgs' mastery over the forces of nature.[18]

Flora enjoyed immediate fame: in 1590, the painter and writer Lomazzo described it in glowing terms in his *Idea del tempio della pittura* (Idea of the temple of painting):

> [...] the artist has recently painted a very beautiful woman from the bust up, entirely composed of flowers, going by the name of the nymph Flora. Here may be seen all sorts of flowers, portrayed after nature in such a way that the ones placed on the flesh and limbs are naturally adapted to this role, while almost all the rest are arranged in the headdress, except for the majority of white flowers. These constitute the inner lining of the dress, whose exterior is composed of leaves, belonging, for the most part, to the flowers portrayed in the picture. From far away, this painting represents nothing but a very beautiful woman. But up close, while the appearance of a woman persists, it displays only flowers and leaves, assembled and composed together.[19]

It is worth analysing this passage by Lomazzo. Firstly, because it reflects the rhetorical devices prevalent in Renaissance and Baroque writings on art, given that by this date Lomazzo had gone blind and must have made use of other people's descriptions and standard opinions for his ekphrasis. Despite this, what he recounts and the way he does so is extremely interesting. Particularly striking is his affirmation that the flowers that make up the nymph's face are "ritratti del natural talmente" (copied from nature). In order to explain the origins of Arcimboldo's composite heads, I referred earlier to the scientific approach to nature prevalent in Milan from the time of Leonardo onwards. Arcimboldo actively participated in this tradition, as we know from accounts by leading naturalists of the day and particularly from his numerous depictions of natural objects. Among the accounts by contemporary naturalists, the Bolognese Ulisse Aldovrandi (1522–1605) noted that Arcimboldo had produced first-hand studies of animals and plants, some of them commissioned by him, such as the five now in the Biblioteca Universitaria, Bologna. There are a larger number in Vienna (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek) and Dresden (Kupferstich-Kabinett). They are all watercolours and washes of plants and animals. Of the dated ones, all are from the period when Arcimboldo was in the service of the imperial court, suggesting that his Milanese interests were stimulated by the enthusiasm for these subjects manifested by both Maximilian II and Rudolf II.[20] The prestige that Arcimboldo enjoyed as a painter of the natural world was remarkable, as the doctor and naturalist Franciscus Paduanis commented to Ulisse Aldovrandi in a letter from Prague dated 11 September 1585.[21]

Flora is an outstanding example of Arcimboldo's mastery in the depiction of nature, as well as of his enormous curiosity, given the large variety of flowers represented. To date there is no specific study on the flowers and plants in this painting but there is a useful one undertaken by

Alexander Wied and Sam Segal on a comparable work, *Spring*, in the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in Madrid [Fig. 4], in which the authors identify as many as eighty different species from Europe, Asia and South America.[22] Many of them – daisies, roses, carnations and white irises – reappear in *Flora*. The range of flowers depicted by Arcimboldo had consequences that were not just scientific but also artistic, as they resulted in a remarkably subtle and varied chromatic palette that also relates to the origins of the myth of Flora. In his *Fastos* (V), Ovid tells of the melancholy, monochromatic nature of the world at its outset, enlivened only by the green of the leaves and the grass, until Zephyrus, the wind god, made Chloris pregnant. After her transformation into Flora she brought all the colours of the flowers into the world. In his highly influential treatise *Immagini colla sposizione degli dei degli antichi* (Images depicting the gods of the ancients) (Venice, 1556), the mythographer Vincenzo Cartari referred to Flora's association with colour when he noted that she was shown: "with a garland of different flowers on her head and a dress also painted with flowers of different colours: as they say that there are few colours that do not adorn the earth when it flowers."[23] Arcimboldo arranged the flowers to suit the goddess's flesh tones, hair and clothing, but by using rose petals for the lips he revealed his knowledge of Ovid's text, which says of Flora that "as she speaks, her lips breathe spring roses".

The second phrase from Lomazzo's comments worth analysing is the one on the dual contemplation that *Flora* permits (and thus, by extension, all of Arcimboldo's composite heads): seen from a distance the image shows the face of a young woman but from close up it reveals its unusual structure of different flowers and plants. This observation is a pertinent one as not only does it add a playful dimension to the consideration of these works but also draws attention to its creator's miniaturist virtuosity. All the composite heads are painted on wood, an unusual support for small-scale paintings in late sixteenth-century Italy, but this can be explained by the fact that it allows for much greater detail than canvas. Lomazzo's words encourage us to look at *Flora* in a particular way. Relevant in this sense is the original, identifying inscription in the upper part of the painting, which reads "LA FLORA – DELL'ARCIMBOLDO", as are the others on the reverse of similar compositions. *Water* in Vienna is inscribed "AQUA", while *Fire* (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Gemäldegalerie, Vienna) is inscribed "IGNII". On the reverse of *Spring* in the Academia de San Fernando is the inscription "LA PRIMAVERA/Va accompagnato con l'Aria, ch . . . una testa de Ucelli". All this points to Arcimboldo's concern that his paintings were correctly interpreted and displayed due to his awareness of their unusual nature. For example, *Spring* was part of a series of the *Seasons* given as a

Fig. 4
Giuseppe Arcimboldo,
Spring, 1563. Oil on panel;
66 x 50 cm. Real Academia
de Bellas Artes de San
Fernando, Madrid

gift to Philip II (1527–1598) together with another series of the *Elements*. The inscription indicates that the two series should be displayed mixed together, with *Spring* next to *Air*.[24]

Lomazzo was the first but not the only writer to describe *Flora*. On his return to Milan, Arcimboldo, who was probably also an amateur poet, surrounded himself with writers and humanists ready to celebrate his talents. In 1591 he sent a gift to the emperor in the form of the above-mentioned portrait of Rudolf II as *Vertumnus*, which is possibly his most celebrated work. Arcimboldo turned *Vertumnus* into a pair with the *Flora* that he had sent to Prague a year earlier and, in a reflection of his awareness of the works' importance, he called on his erudite friends to compose a short publication for the emperor explaining the paintings and even how they should be seen: a sort of exhibition "catalogue" *avant la lettre*. Entitled *Al invittissimo Cesare Rodolfo Secondo. Componimenti sopra li due quadric Flora, e Vertumno, fatti a Sua Sac. Ces. Maestà da Giuseppe Arcimboldo Milanese*, the text was published in Milan in 1591 by the printer Paolo Gottardo Pontio. The author was Giovanni Filippo Gherardini, with contributions from other local literati such as Gregorio Camanini, Gherardo Borgogni, Bernardo Baldini, Segismondo Foliano and G.A. da Milano, totalling seventeen poems in Italian and Latin. As Giacomo Berra has noted, these compositions reveal the authors' fascination with the innovative, *giocoso* (playful) and capricious character of Arcimboldo's works and they attempt to emulate these qualities in their poems. This is evident, for example, in Comanini's madrigal, the verses of which reflect the ambiguity of an image that is at the same time unity (the goddess Flora) and variety (the flowers of which it is composed):

Am I Flora or just flowers?
If a flower, how can I seem to
Smile like Flora? And if I am Flora,
How can I be Flora and only flowers?
Ah, I am not flowers, and I am not Flora.
No, I am both Flora and flowers.
A thousand flowers and one Flora.
Living flower, live Flora,
Since flowers make Flora, and Flora, flowers.
Do you know how? The wise painter
Changed flowers into Flora, and
Flora into flowers.[25]

In other compositions in this volume, for example "Il Vertumno dell'Arcimboldo in arrivando, parla a Flora et essa al fine gli responde" (Arcimboldo's Vertumnus, arriving [in Prague] speaks to Flora and finally she replies) by Gherardini, Flora and Vertumnus engage in a dialogue,

with the former complaining about those who identify her as the famous Roman prostitute of the same name. The two treat each other as lovers in a curious twist on the classical myth, as Flora's lover was in fact Zephyrus while Vertumnus's beloved was Pomona. It is not known if this dialogue derives solely from Gherardini's imagination or if Arcimboldo conceived of Vertumnus conversing with Flora, but the fact that the former is presented frontally while Flora is shown in three-quarter profile, projecting her shadow to the right rather than being in profile like many of Arcimboldo's other heads, increases the volume of the figures and their sense of communicating, suggesting the second hypothesis.

In contrast to the wealth of information on the circumstances in which *Flora* was created, there are no documentary or literary references to the painting that accompanies it in the present exhibition. The first known reference dates from 1911 when Olaf Granberg included it in his monumental catalogue of foreign paintings in Swedish collections. Describing it as a "Young woman with a bare breast", also made up of flowers, Granberg paired it with *Flora* and stated that both had belonged to Christina of Sweden (queen of that country from 1632 to 1654), in whose possession they were in 1652. Along with many other paintings from the imperial collection, the Swedes had taken them as booty in Prague in 1648 in one of the last episodes in the Thirty Years War (1618–1648). We also know from Granberg that the two paintings left the Swedish royal collection at some point and were in various different Swedish private collections.[26] On 25 March 1965 they were auctioned at Sotheby's in London (lots 32 and 33),[27] from where they entered the New York art market and were acquired by their present owner.[28] The frames were changed after the paintings were sold in London. The previous, gilded ones were replaced with the present silver and hardstone frames designed by the eminent Italian art historian Zeri, as he noted in a letter to his colleague Berra of 13 September 1988. That letter also includes his opinion on *Flora*, which he describes as extremely beautiful and which he states must have belonged to Rudolf II.[29] The paintings have not featured in any of the exhibitions on Arcimboldo but they have been reproduced in all the catalogues and are invariably included in the specialist bibliographies. *Flora* is often present in exhibitions through a copy in a private collection in Paris, which is attributed to the workshop of Arcimboldo but also to later artists such as the Venetian Francesco Zucchi (1692–1764).[30]

Who is Flora's companion? Both images are created from an assembly of a wide range of flowers but, despite their evident similarity, there are differences between them. The most obvious is that in the second painting the female figure reveals a bare breast, a detail that has led scholars to hesitate when also identifying her as Flora, explaining why Granberg cautiously called her a "Jeune dame" and Zeri used the ambiguous *Ritratto*

di donna (Portrait of a woman). Recently, however, Berra has identified her as *Flora meretrix* [Cat. 2], that is, a different Flora to the one in the other painting. [31] This is feasible as the Renaissance was aware of two distinct classical traditions for this figure: the mythological Flora, wife of Zephyrus, who was the personification of spring and synonymous with marital harmony and natural fecundity according to the Ovidian tradition; and Flora meretrix, a legendary Roman prostitute who on her death left her fortune for the celebration of the festivals in Rome known as the *Floralie*, which involved provocative sexual games. The two myths were confused in the Middle Ages, with Giovanni Boccaccio, for example, referring in *De claris mulieribus* (1359) to "Flora the prostitute, goddess of flowers and wife of Zephyrus". This explains why brides and recently married women but also courtesans were identified with Flora in the Renaissance.[32] The fact that in the above-mentioned text Gherardini had Flora complain about being continually confused with a Roman prostitute of the same name might have encouraged Arcimboldo to paint a second Flora who clearly resembled that one. If this were the case, *Flora meretrix* would date from after 1590.

There is a second element that differentiates the two paintings, which is the presence in *Flora meretrix* of up to fifteen small animals camouflaged among the foliage. They are mainly insects (butterflies, grasshoppers, caterpillar, a ladybird and an ant) but there is also a snail and a lizard. In addition, the plaits of hair that fall over the figure's shoulders are in fact octopus tentacles [see. pp. 61-71]. These creatures have gone unnoticed up until now as they are almost impossible to see in the existing photographs.[33]

Both the bare breast and the numerous animals had different and even contradictory meanings in Renaissance culture, encouraging caution when proposing an iconographic interpretation. While the bare breast had an obvious erotic connotation and appears as such in paintings of courtesans, it could also have a completely opposite meaning, as Giovanni Bonifaccio notes in *L'arte de'Cenni* (Vicenza, 1616):

> Showing the breast bare: because the breast is the seat of the heart, and because it is often said that when speaking with truth and sincerity one does so with the heart, *aperto pectore* in Latin: thus opening the clothing that covers the breast is a sign that indicates wishing to show the heart, a gesture of truth and sincerity.[34]

Similarly, the snail, for example, may allude to heresy, but also to patience; the butterfly is a symbol of the Christian soul or of a lustful man; the grasshopper has a negative side due to its role in one of the seven plagues of Egypt, but for some writers it alludes to Christ and the Virgin; the octopus may refer both to hope in God and to the vice of lust, and so on.[35]

Only the context allows us to deduce the meaning of these elements in each case. Seen here in Arcimboldo's painting they support the identification of the figure as *Flora meretrix*. This is for two reasons. Firstly, the presence of animals that have only negative connotations such as the lizard (here a female specimen), which symbolises human evil, and the caterpillar, which refers to the devil and to lust. The fact that many of these potential negative readings have a sexual connotation reinforces the interpretation of the figure as a famous prostitute. The association of these animals with lust culminates with the ant on Flora's nipple, a reference to Zeus, who transformed himself into an ant in order to seduce Eurymedousa. Secondly, a strictly aesthetic element reinforces the identification of *Flora meretrix*. This is the only work by Arcimboldo that conveys sensuality in addition to the other aspects normally transmitted by his composite heads, such as surprise, paradox or technical virtuosity. The contrast with *Flora* is obvious and is not just due to the bare breast. This figure's eyelids are lighter, resulting in large eyes that look directly at the viewer, while the artist has achieved the miracle of imbuing the white petals that form the bare skin with sensuality through his use of a narrower colour range and more diffused forms.

Giuseppe Arcimboldo was not one of the great geniuses of the Renaissance. Several modern-day art historians such as Pierre Rosenberg have described him as a mediocre, "almost artisan" painter and he certainly does not bear comparison with Michelangelo (1475–1564), Leonardo, Correggio (1489–1534), Titian or so many others, particularly if judged by the rigid criteria of art theory of his own day. Arcimboldo must have been aware of his limitations with regard to major history painting (religious or secular) as his patrons, Maximilian II and Rudolf II, would also have been. They never asked him to produce works of that type, having other painters better equipped for the task such as Bartholomeus Spranger (1546–1611) from Flanders and the German Hans von Aachen (1552–1615). Arcimboldo's great virtue lay in finding his own artistic direction. The idea of a personal style, both in literature and the arts, became established during the sixteenth century. This notion was defended by the Renaissance author Baldassare Castiglione in 1528 (*The Courtier*, I, 37) and was soon assimilated by the leading art theoreticians. With his composite heads Arcimboldo not only found his own, unusual direction in the competitive art world of the second half of the sixteenth century (his contemporary Morigi described him as a *pittore raro* (rare painter) in 1592), but also devised a type of painting that is as easily recognisable as it is inseparable from his name. Furthermore, due to its ingeniousness and light-heartedness, this was a type of painting that probably attracted the contemporary public in a way not always achieved by the creations of the great geniuses.

1. On Arcimboldo's critical fortune, see Andreas Beyer, "'. . . il gran pittore Giuseppe Arcimboldo'. Comment s'est construite la gloire d'Arcimboldo", in Sylvia Ferino-Pagden, ed. *Arcimboldo 1526–1593*. Exh. cat. Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum; Paris: Musée du Luxembourg, 2007–8. Milan: Skira; Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum; Paris: Musée du Luxembourg, 2007, 25–31.
2 Such as F.C. Legrand and F. Sluys. *Arcimboldo et les arcimboldesques*. Paris: La Nef, 1955.
3. *Arcimboldo*. Milan: Franco Maria Ricci, 1980.
4. "Musings of a literary and pseudo-historical nature". Zeri's text, "Effetto pasticcio. Ancora un Arcimboldo", was originally published in *La Stampa* on 22 April 1987 (page 3) and was included with the title "Effetto pasticcio", in Federico Zeri, *Orto aperto*. Milan: Longanesi, 1990, 71–76.
5. See Beyer 2007. The exhibition had its successors in *Arcimboldo, 1526–1593: Nature and Fantasy* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2010–11) and *Arcimboldo. Artista milanese tra Leonardo e Caravaggio* (Palazzo Reale, Milan, 2011), also curated by Silvia Ferino-Pagden.
6. Silvio Leydi, "Giuseppe Arcimboldo à Milan. Documents et hypothèses", in Ferino-Pagden, ed. 2007, 37–52.
7. Silvia Ferino-Pagden, ". . . e massime con le invenzioni e caprici, ne'quale egli è único al mondo: il rebus Arcimboldo", in *Arcimboldo. Artista milanese tra Leonardo e Caravaggio*. Exh. cat. Milan: Palazzo Reale; Milan: Skira, 2011, 153–58.
8. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, "Giuseppe Arcimboldo, the Habsburgs' Leonardo", in B. Bukovinská, L. Konečný and I. Muchka, eds. *Rudolf II, Prague and the World*. Prague: Artefactum, 1999, 169–76.
9. "[. . .] poichè egli, componendo insieme l'imagini delle sensibili cose da lui vedute, ne forma strani capricci et idoli non più da forza di fantasia inventati, quello che pare impossibile a congiungersi accozzando con molta destrezza e facendone resultar ciò che vuole".
10. Giacomo Berra, "Allegoria e mitologia nella pittura dell'Arcimboldo: La '*Flora*' e il '*Vertumno*' nei versi di un libretto sconosciuto di rime", *Acme*, no. 41/2 (1988): 11–39. For the theoretical origins of these concepts, see Guido Ciclioni, "The matter of the imagination. The Renaissance debate over icastic and fantastic imitation", *Camenae*, no. 8 (2010): 1–21.
11. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Arcimboldo. Visual Jokes, Natural History, and Still-Life Painting*. Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009, particularly chapters 2–4. The latest opinions of both DaCosta Kaufmann and Francesco Porzio on this subject are cited (see following note).
12. Francesco Porzio, "Arcimboldo: le stagioni 'milanesi' e l'origine dell'invenzione", in *Arcimboldo. Artista milanese tra Leonardo e Caravaggio* 2011, 221–53.
13. *The Notebooks of Leonardo Da Vinci*. Compiled and edited from the original by Jean Paul Richter. London, 1880, n. 585.
14. DaCosta Kaufmann 2009, 104–5.
15. On the meaning of *grilli* in the Renaissance, see Sarah Blake Macham, *Pliny and the Artistic Culture of the Italian Renaissance. The Legacy of the 'Natural History'*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2013, 298–99.
16. Felipe de Guevara, *Comentarios de la pintura*. Madrid, 1788, 45.
17. Erik A. De Jong, "A Garden Book made for Emperor Rudolf II in 1593: Hans Puechfeldner's Nützliches Khünstbüech der Gartnereij", in Therese O'Malley and Amy R.W. Meyers, eds. *The Art of Natural History. Illustrated Treatises and Botanical Paintings, 1400–1850*. Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2008, 187–203. (Studies in the History of Art, 69).
18. T. DaCosta Kaufmann, "Arcimboldo's Imperial Allegories", *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 39 (Basel, 1976): 275–96.
19. "[. . .] ha dipinto ora una bellissima femina, dal petto in sù composta tutta di fiori, sotto il nome della Ninfa Flora; in cui si veggono tutte le sorti di fiori, ritratti dal naturale talmente, che nella carnagione e membri sono posti quelli che a ciò naturalemente rappresentare sono accommodati, et in un ornamento di testa son posti quasi tutti gli altri, fuor che la maggior parte de bianchi, qualli sono collocati come la fodera di sotto le veste, in cui sopra si veggono le foglie ritratte al naturale della maggior parte dei fiori che sono nella imagine. Questa da longi non rappresenta altro che una bellíssima femina, e d'appresso, quantonque pur vesti l'apparenza di femina, mostra se non fiori e frondi, composti insieme e uniti". Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, *Idea of the Temple of Painting*. Ed. and trans. Jean Julia Chai. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013, 165.
20. Lee Hendrix and Thea Vignau-Wilberg. *Nature Illuminated: Flora and Fauna from the Court of Emperor Rudolf II*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1997.
21. DaCosta Kaufmann 2009, 115–64.
22. Alexander Wied and Sam Segal, "Giuseppe Arcimboldo. Le printemps, 1563", in Ferino-Pagden, ed. 2007, 125–26.
23. "con ghirlanda in capo di diversi fiori, e veste parimente tutta dipinta a fiori di colori diversi: perche dicono che pocchi sono i colori, de i qualli non si adorni la terra quando fiorisce". Quoted from the Venice edition of 1581 published by Giordano Ziletti, 262.
24. The arrangement must have been similar to that of the *Seasons* and the *Elements* presented to Maximilian II on New Year's Day 1569 and known from a poem by Fonteo. See DaCosta Kaufmann 2009, 100–2.
25. "Son Io Flora, o pur fiori?/Se fior, come di Flora/Ho col sembiante il riso? Es'io son Flora,/Come Flora è sol fiori?/Ah non fiori sono io, non io son Flora./ Anzi son Flora e fiori./Vivi fior, viva Flora,/Fior mille, una Flora./Però che i fior fan flora, e Flora i fiori./Sai come? I fiori in Flora/Cangiò saggio Pittor', e Flora in fiori." Lomazzo 2013, 165–66.
26. Olaf Granberg. *Inventaire général des trésors d'art, peintures et sculptures, principalment de maîtres étrangers (non scandinaves) en Suède*. Vol. 1. Stockholm, 1911, 74 (no. 325). Granberg included the measurements of this second work ("Young woman with a bare breast") (80.4 x 60.6 cm), which coincide with those of the second painting in this exhibition (*Flora meretrix*).

27. After they were owned by Christina of Sweden and before they were auctioned in London in 1965, the paintings are documented in the possession of the Count von Fersen Gyldenstople, Christian Hammer, Captain Harry Wahlin and Dr Axel Wenner-Gran, all in Stockholm. An indication of the low opinion of Arcimboldo in the nineteenth century is Christian Hammer's unsuccessful attempt to sell both paintings at auction in Cologne in 1894.
28. Görel Cavalli-Björkman, "iv. 37. Giuseppe Arcimboldo, Flore", in Ferino-Pagden, ed. 2007, 184–86.
29. The best context for Arcimboldo's *Flora* including iconographic precedents of Bernardino Luini is to be found in Giacomo Berra, "l'Arcimboldo 'c'huom forma d'ogni cosa': capricci pittorici, elogi letterari e scherzi poetici nella Milano di fine cinquecento", in *Arcimboldo. Artista milanese tra Leonardo e Caravaggio* 2011, 283–314. The reference to Zeri's letter is on page 312, note 63.
30. Legrand and Sluys 1955, 55.
31. Berra 2011, 301.
32. Lynne Lawner, *Lives of the Courtesans. Portraits of the Renaissance*. New York: Rizzoli, 1987, 97–102.
33. I would like to thank Andrés Galera Gómez for the identification of the animals in *Flora meretrix*. The appearance of these animals might suggest Fauna but nothing in the iconography supports this identification, particularly because that figure is normally associated with the Roman Bona Dea, famous for her modesty. On page 262 of his treatise *Immagini colla sposizione degli dei degli antichi* (Images depicting the gods of the ancients) (Venice, 1556), Vincenzo Cartari states the following on Fauna: "della qualle si legge che ella fu gia donna di tanta castità che non vide mai, ne udi pure nominare altro huomo, che suo marito, e non fu mai veduta uscire sella sua stanza" ("of whom we read that she was the most chaste woman ever seen, who never saw nor listened to the name of any man other than her husband, and who was never seen leaving his room"). As with plants and animals in general, insects were the subject of lively interest at Rudolf II's court, as evident in the work of Joris Hoefnagel. See Janice Neri, *The Insect and the Image. Visualizing Nature in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1700*. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011, 3–26.
34. "Mostrar il petto aperto: Perche il petto è la sede del cuore, et il parlare veramente, et sinceramente è detto da noi esser fatto cul cuore, che i latino dicono aperto pectore: perciò l'aprirsi i panni dinanzi al petto, sarà gesto di voler mostrar il cuore, e cosi di realtà, et sincerità" (page 353). On the different meanings of displaying bare breasts in Renaissance painting, see Enrico Maria Dal Pozzolo, *Colori d'amore. Parole, gesti e carezze nella pittura veneziana del Cinquecento*. Treviso: Canova, 2008, 31–50.35. For the possible meaning of these animals, see Mirella Levi D'Ancona, *Lo Zoo del Rinascimento. El significato degli animali nella pittura italiana dal XIV al XVI secolo*. Lucca: Pacini Fazzi, 2001.

Framing Arcimboldo

LYNN ROBERTS AND PAUL MITCHELL

Fundación Juan March

Giuseppe Arcimboldo was one of the painters who most embodied the spirit of Mannerism. His art is analogous to architecture in the hands of Michelangelo, one of the earliest exponents of Mannerism: a playful and anarchic take on the classical, which deforms and exaggerates various elements, remaking them in imaginative and inventive ways.

For example, in the entrance hall of Michelangelo's Biblioteca Laurenziana, Florence (ca. 1524–1534, completed in the 1550s), the classical proportions of the pedimented and pilastered windows are subverted by exaggeration: they are elongated and narrowed, while the pediments become top-heavy, and tension is created between curved and triangular frontons [Fig. 1]. A gigantic order of columns is inserted between the windows and they are supported on greatly enlarged modillions. The refinement and balance of the Renaissance architectural façade, which appeared in the frames of fifteenth- and early sixteenth-

Fig. 1
After Michelangelo, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Florence, 1525–1571

Fig. 2
Agnolo Bronzino, *Giovanni de' Medici*, 1550–1551. Oil on panel; 66.2 × 52.8 cm. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

century altarpieces, has been completely remade, just as Arcimboldo was to remake the art of court portraiture. The staircase is finished by huge swooping volutes. These would reappear on picture frames in the guise of exaggerated diagonal gadrooning and raking hooks, imparting a theatrical dynamism to the paintings they contained, such as that on Agnolo Bronzino's (1503–1572) mid-sixteenth-century portrait of Giovanni de' Medici, a late (ca. 1580) example of the style [Fig. 2].[1]

Many elements of Mannerist architecture – including the over-sized brackets or modillions, elongated aedicular forms, and open and broken triangular, hemispherical and swan's neck pediments (sometimes doubled up with internal arches or played off against each other) – can be seen in Leone Leoni's (ca. 1509–1590) Casa degli Omenoni in Arcimboldo's birthplace, Milan [Fig. 3]. It was completed three years after the artist left the city, but is a potent marker of contemporary style during his late twenties and thirties.

As with the volutes from the Biblioteca Laurenziana, these enlarged modillions, anti-classical caryatids, pediments and other ornaments all migrated to picture frames; in freely stylised and simplified versions they formed eye-catching settings for the work of Antonio da Correggio, Jacopo da Pontormo (1494–1557) and their peers [Fig. 4]. It is probable that Arcimboldo's earlier works may have been framed in designs very similar to these, possibly in a Lombardic or Piedmontese version of the Tuscan Mannerist frame.

Fig. 3
Leone Leoni, Casa degli Omenoni, Milan, 1565

Fig. 4
Domenico Beccafumi, *Madonna and Child with the Infant St John the Baptist*, ca. 1542. Oil on panel; panel: 92 × 69 cm; frame: 134.5 × 100 × 18 cm. Art Gallery of New South Wales Foundation Purchase 1992, Sydney

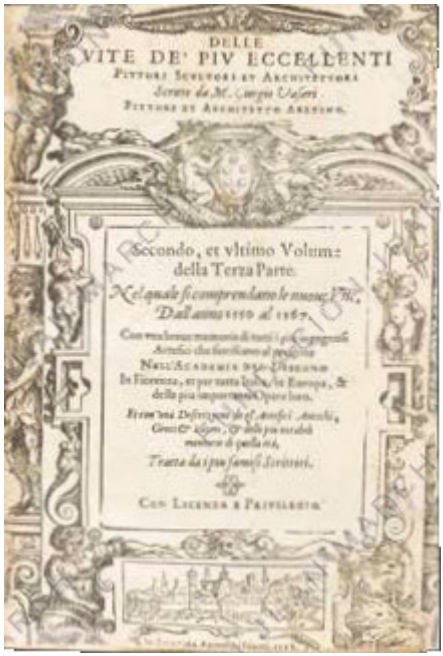


Fig. 5
Wenzel Jamnitzer, Relief mounted as a mirror frame. Silver gilt and ebony looking-glass frame, ca. 1568; 29.5 × 23.2 cm. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Fig. 6
Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori et architetori*, 2nd edition (expanded), 1568. Title page of the second volume of the third part. Xilography. Casa Buonarroti, Florence

Arcimboldo left Milan in 1562, at the age of thirty-six, for the court of the Habsburg Holy Roman Emperor. In 1564 Maximilian II was crowned and Arcimboldo became his artist. The court at Vienna had become a magnet for artists and craftsmen of international repute: the Mannerist goldsmith Wenzel Jamnitzer (1507/08–1585), for example, was also employed by the emperor (and by his son, Rudolf II). Jamnitzer was born in Vienna but had settled in Nuremberg, where he created playful, surrealist objects in the vein of Arcimboldo's paintings, such as the silver bell encrusted with lizards, fruit, flowers and insects in the British Museum, London. He produced frames too, like this ebony and silver example (now used for a looking-glass) [Fig. 5]. Here, architectural ornament (exaggerated scrolls) mingles with organic motifs ("leatherwork" forms), which became an increasingly important feature of Mannerist frames.

Similar leatherwork scrolls, as well as complex pedimented aedicular forms and other of the Mannerist features noted above, all appear in the title page of Giorgio Vasari's (1511–1574) *Lives of the Artists* (1568 edition), which, like many contemporary ornamental prints, helped to diffuse the style throughout Europe [Fig. 6].

This group of disparate works – architectural, carved, metalwork, graphic – from the 1550s and 1560s illustrates the stylistic nexus within

which Arcimboldo was working, and indicates how his portraits might originally have been framed. One further important medium from this period which may have influenced the latter question is the technique of *pietre dure*. This skill was rediscovered during the Renaissance, when inlaid Roman work and mosaics were at first copied and then remade in the taste of contemporary painting. With the advent of Mannerism, works in *pietre dure* naturally took on the relevant forms and motifs of this more avant-garde style, so that with objects such as The Farnese Table (ca. 1569), the outermost "frame" bordering the tabletop is decorated with leatherwork motifs and the two large cartouches at either end have similar scrolling contours [Fig. 7].[2]

The materials used also diverged from the variegated earth-coloured marbles of classical Roman and Renaissance inlaid work. *Pietre dure* during the second half of the sixteenth century and the early seventeenth century imitated the Mannerist use of painting pigments by employing harmonies of intensely coloured semi-precious stones, such as agate, amethyst, lapis lazuli, malachite and rock crystal; sheets of transparent alabaster were even laid over prints or drawings to provide a further enrichment. The hugely enlarged palette of tints and tones enabled by this expanded range of stones moved the craft still further away from the abstract patterns of antique *pietre dure*, so that *trompe-l'oeil* depictions of flowers, fruit and bands of jewellery were regularly set into the tops of tables or wall panels.

These intricate and colourful works of art spawned their own genres of picture frame, based partly on the decorative *pietre dure* borders of furniture and panelling, partly on integral architectural altarpieces made

Fig. 7
Jacopo da Vignola (designer), The Farnese Table, ca. 1569. Marble, alabaster and semi-precious stones; 95.3 × 379.1 × 168.3 cm. *Pietre dure* by Giovanni Mynardo (or Jean Ménard). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Fig. 8
Jacopo Ligozzi, *Christ on the Mount of Olives*, 1608.
Portable altarpiece (with painted wooden carrying case);
painting: 26.6 × 16.1 cm;
tabernacle: 55 × 34 × 8.4 cm;
case: 67.8 × 41.8 × 14 cm.
R.T. Miller Jr Fund. Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin, Ohio

of differently coloured marbles, and partly on inlaid cabinets, which combined painted panels framed in inlays and columns of semi-precious stones. These various influences produced two types of frame: miniature aedicules of inlaid wood, or polychrome faux marble; and *cassetta* frames, their friezes inlaid with shaped panels and cartouches of stone. Both were fashionable from the mid-sixteenth century until well into the seventeenth, becoming ever more intricate and jewel-like. It is often difficult to tell whether the inlaid and faux stone aedicules are French in origin, exported to and copied in Italy, or whether the French frames are influenced by Italian models. The Italian frames, however, seem to originate from the northern regions and thus have a link to Arcimboldo's birthplace.

The French (or imported Italian) aedicules are known as "Corneille de Lyon" or "Clouet" frames, as they were frequently used for small portraits by the artists Corneille de Lyon (1500–ca. 1574) and François Clouet (ca. 1515–1572). However, a slightly later Italian aedicule on a portable altarpiece of 1608 by Jacopo Ligozzi (1547–1627) shows how they were also used for religious works [Fig. 8].

While Arcimboldo's surreal portraits would not have been framed in this way, they may possibly have been set in the *cassetta* versions of these inlaid stone and faux stone frames. Gems, jewels, branches of coral and other mineral treasures were all part of the imperial Kunstkammer in Vienna, begun in a formal sense by Ferdinand I (Holy Roman Emperor when Arcimboldo arrived in Austria) and enlarged greatly by Rudolf II when he moved the court – and the court painter – to Prague.[3] It has been suggested that Arcimboldo spent time browsing the contents of the Kunstkammer and that his curiosity about the natural world, already so apparent in the pair of paintings from around 1589–1590 under consideration here, was honed by his time in the company of a dynasty of collectors.[4] The Kunstkammer, as its name suggests, included paintings and bibelots as well as natural objects (the latter were later denoted as belonging to the Wunderkammer[5]); the paintings were often quite small, including works such as the portable altarpiece mentioned above, and frames were produced for them which identified them as part of the Kunstkammer and in materials which were seen in their natural state in the Wunderkammer.[6]

These *pietre dure cassetta* frames might have been used for small portraits, as were the inlaid "Corneille de Lyon", or "Clouet", aedicules [Fig. 9]; they are also found on mythological scenes and sacred subjects.

The art historian Federico Zeri, who is credited with designing the pair of distinctive *pietre dure* frames on the present portraits by Arcimboldo, would have been one of the few twentieth-century experts (apart from a frame historian) with the tools and knowledge to have followed the

Fig. 9
Ebony *cassetta* frame with crystal and lapis lazuli *pietre dure* panels and *niello* inlay, ca. 1600. 34.6 × 30.2 cm. Robert Lehman Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

paths of research outlined in this essay. His first publication was a work on the Mannerist style, *Pittura e Controriforma* (1957); he catalogued all the Italian paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (*The Florentine/Venetian/Sienese School*, 1971–1980), as well as those in the Galleria Spada and Galleria Pallavicini, Rome (1954 and 1959); and he collected mosaics and owned *pietre dure* furniture.

The original frames for existing portraits by Arcimboldo seem to have vanished completely, and the riddle of how to present such idiosyncratic objects in a form that is both historically and aesthetically acceptable must have seemed an irresistible challenge. The portrait of *Summer* in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, has been given a narrow ebonised frame with a ripple moulding, which is a gesture towards the framing of works in a Kunstkammer, and acts as an almost invisible foil to the rich colouring of summer fruits, grain and vegetables in the painting [Fig.10].

A much later portrait of the emperor Rudolf II as Vertumnus was looted from his Kunstkammer in Prague in the seventeenth century and carried off to Skokloster Castle, Sweden [see Fig. 3, p. 14]; presumably only the painted panel itself was taken, which may indicate that the original frame was relatively large and/or heavy. It has since been set in a very minimal flat frame of stained and polished wood, which is hardly adequate to contain the exuberant harvest festival of the imperial portrait.

The set of the four *Seasons* in the Louvre, Paris, has acquired a seventeenth-century internal painted border of flowers, and a group of

Fig. 10
Giuseppe Arcimboldo, *Summer*, 1563. Oil on limewood; 84 × 57 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

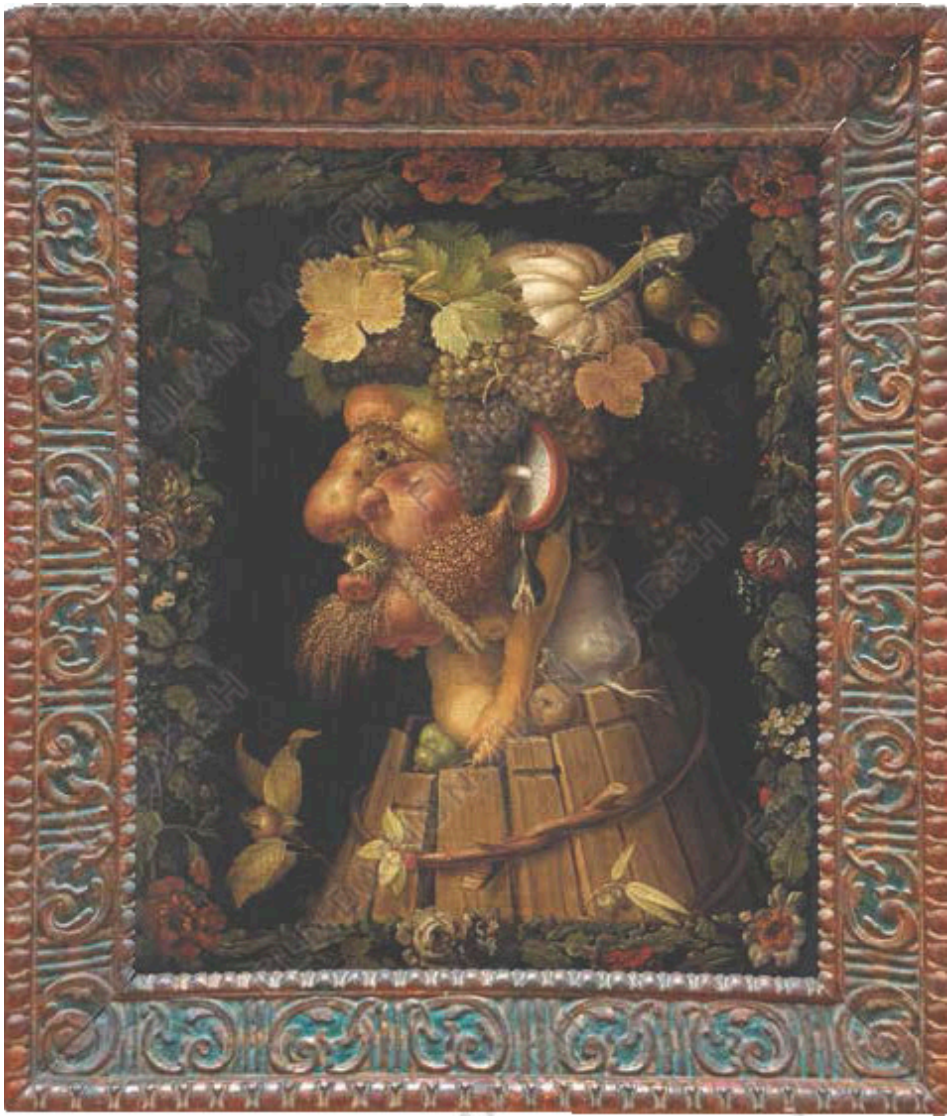


Fig. 11
Giuseppe Arcimboldo,
Autumn, 1573.
Oil on canvas; 76 × 63.5 cm.
Musée du Louvre, Paris

frames which seems to have been custom-made to reflect Mannerist motifs, while not being historically accurate in form [Fig. 11].

In the face of these disparate solutions to the problem of framing Arcimboldo, Zeri has thought laterally and produced a very individual design, based on the *pietre dure* frames of a Kunstkammer, in which the colour harmony of the stones echoes those of each respective painting. With their grey "ebonised" mouldings, the frames [see pp. 41, 55, 57, 65, 71] are wide enough to provide a definitive boundary around the pictures; their colouring is light and playful, in the spirit of the flowers of which the portraits are composed; they emphasise the supremely decorative aspect of the artist's work; and they have enough historical authenticity to stand as a very acceptable answer to an otherwise insoluble problem.

1. Paul Mitchell and Lynn Roberts, "Italian Mannerist frames", in Paul Mitchell and Lynn Roberts, *A History of European Picture Frames*. London: Paul Mitchell Ltd in association with Merrell Holberton Ltd, 1996, 26.
2. Anna Maria Giusti, "Roman inlay and Florentine mosaics: the new art of *pietre dure*", in Wolfram Koeppe, ed. *Art of the Royal Court: Treasures in Pietre Dure from the Palaces of Europe*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006, 13–27.
3. Dr Sabine Haag, *A History of the Kunstkammer, Wien*, 1, http://www.kkhm.at/fileadmin/content/KHM/kkhm/Presse/History_of_the_Kunstkammer.pdf
4. Abigail Tucker, "Arcimboldo's feast for the eyes", *Smithsonian* (Washington, DC, January 2011): 2.
5. Jane Turner, ed. *Grove Dictionary of Art*. Vol. 18. London: Macmillan, 1996, 520–21.
6. Paul Mitchell and Lynn Roberts, "German & Central Europe: Baroque frames", in Mitchell and Roberts 1996, 91.

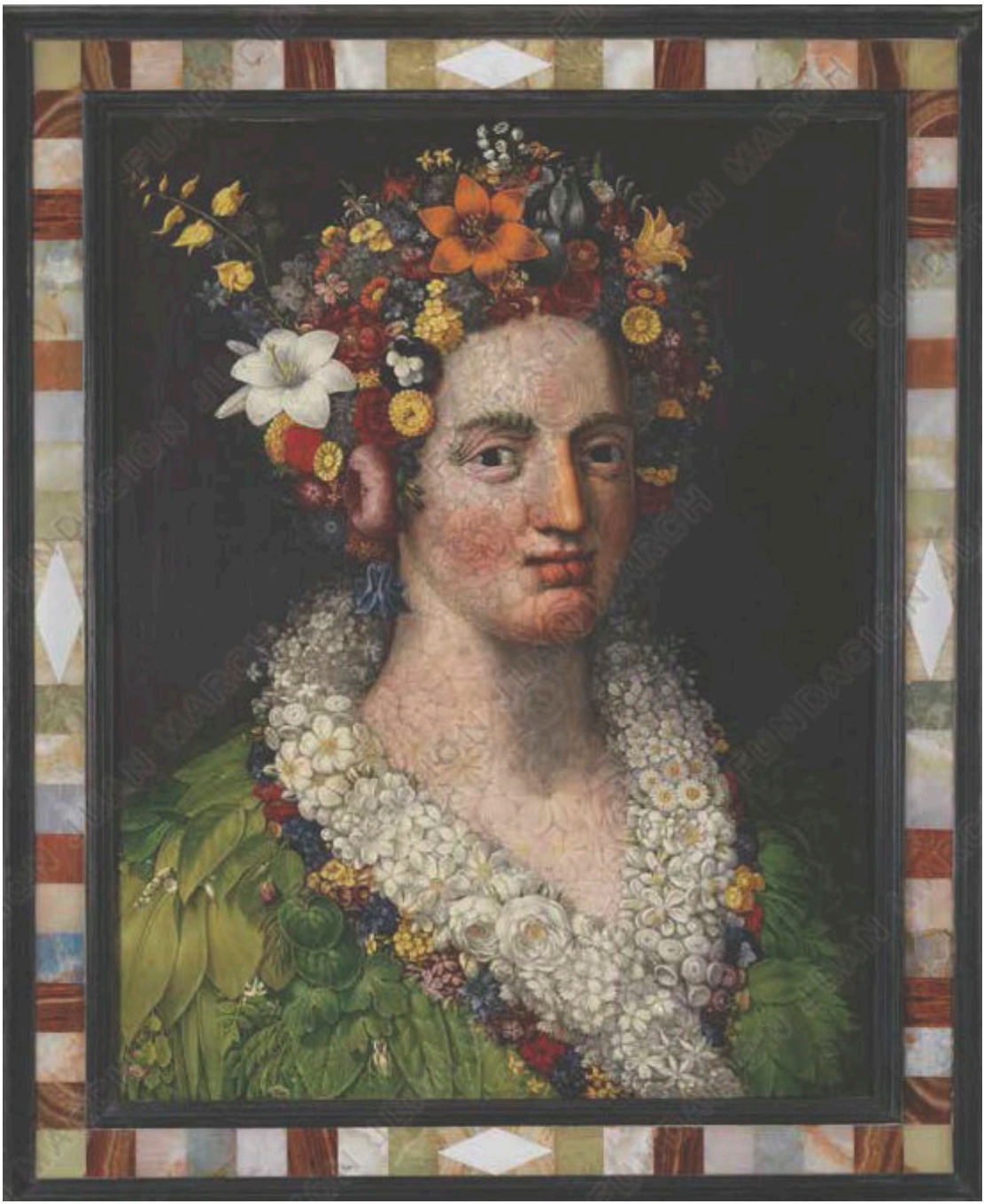
Works in the Exhibition

Fundación Juan March

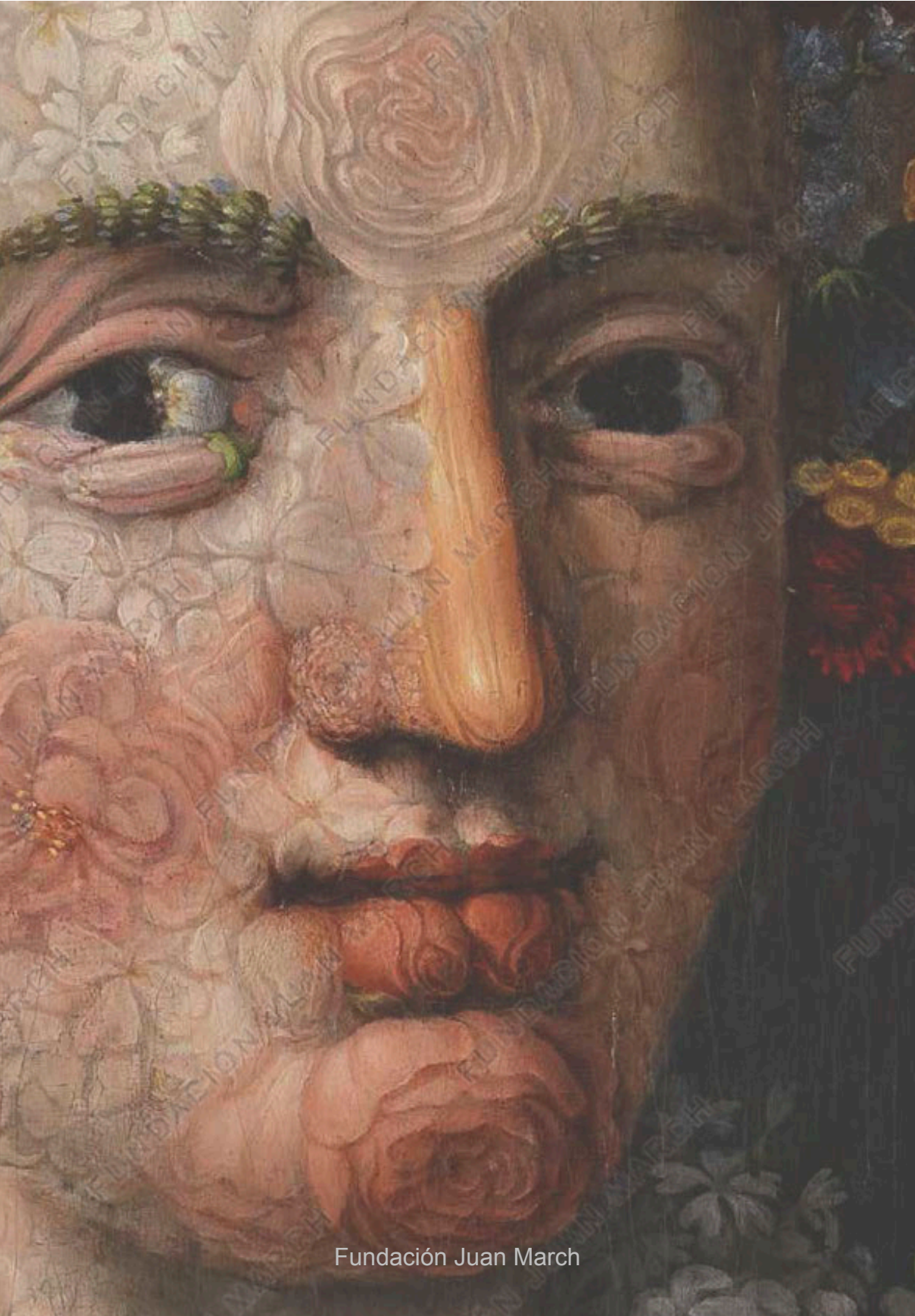
GIUSEPPE ARCIMBOLDO
Milan, 1526–1593

Flora, 1589

Oil on panel
74.5 x 57.5 cm (90.5 x 73.5 cm framed)
Inscription near the top:
"LA FLORA – DELL' ARCIMBOLDO"
The *cassetta* frame in *pietre dure*
was designed by Federico Zeri, ca. 1970
Private collection



Detail of *Flora*, 1589



Detail of *Flora*, 1589

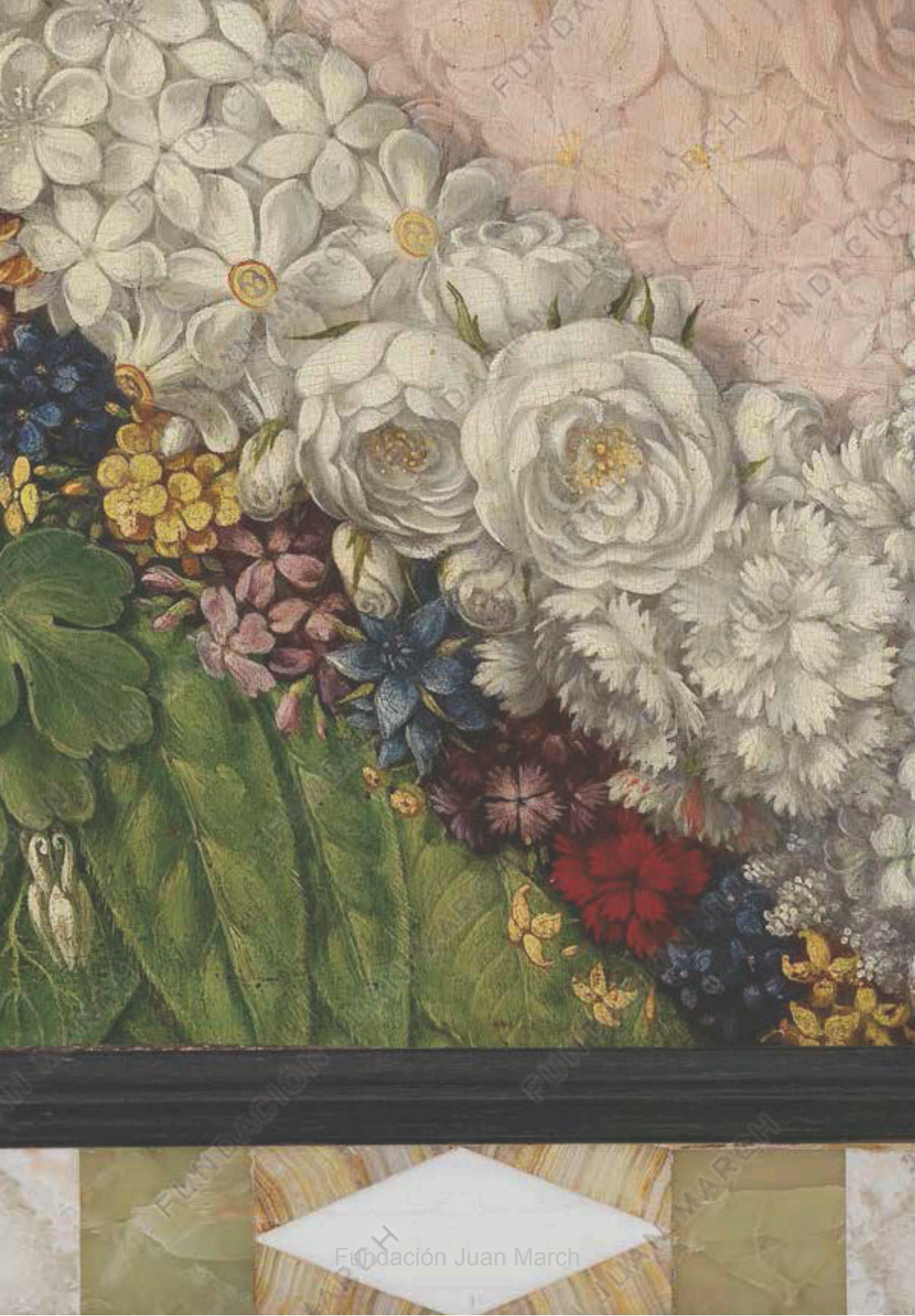
Detail of *Flora*, 1589

Detail of *Flora*, 1589

Detail of *Flora*, 1589

Detail of *Flora*, 1589

Detail of *Flora*, 1589

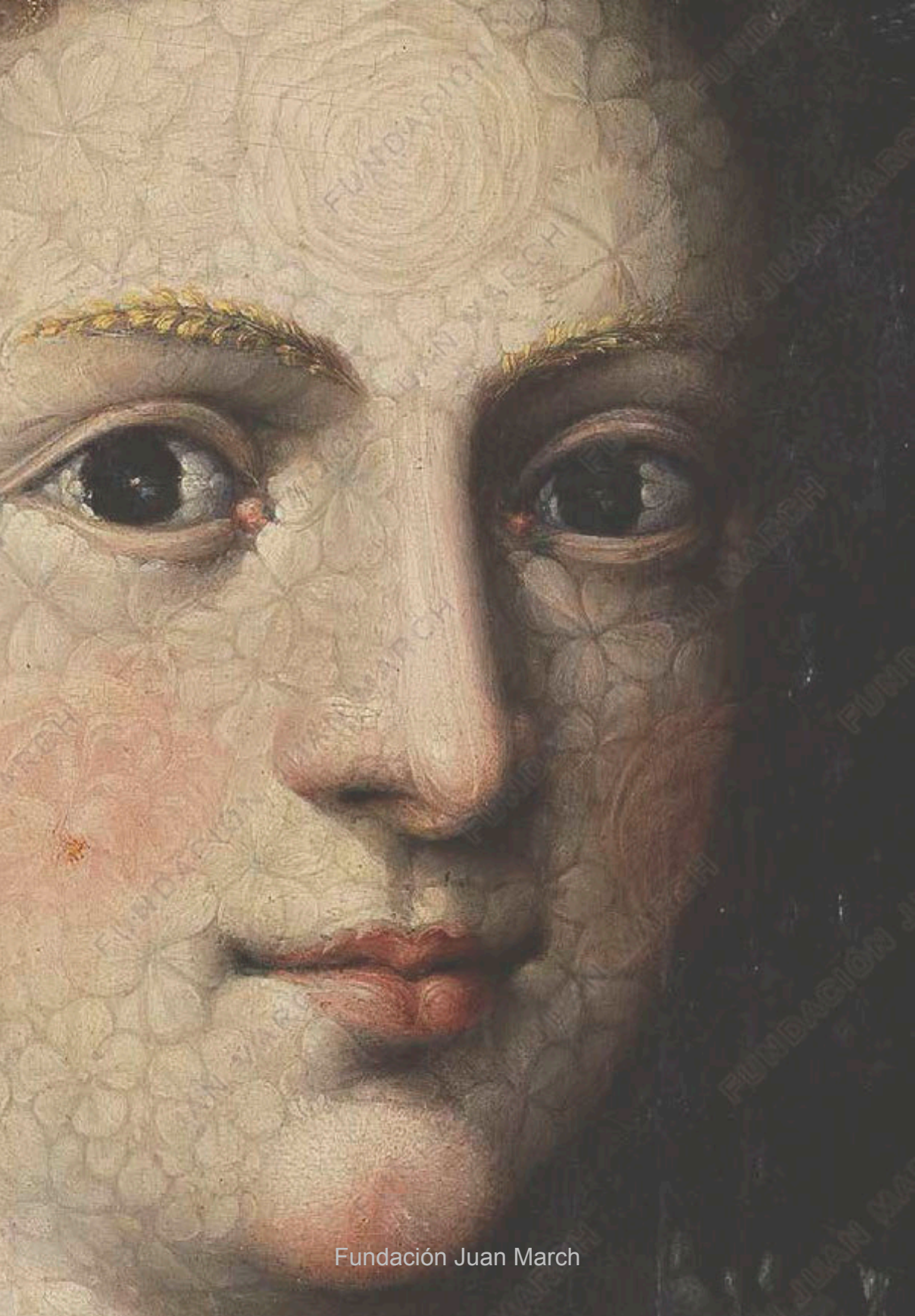


GIUSEPPE ARCIMBOLDO
Milan, 1526–1593

Flora meretrix, ca. 1590

Oil on panel
80.5 x 61 cm (95.5 x 75.5 cm framed)
The *cassetta* frame in *pietre dure*
was designed by Federico Zeri, ca. 1970
Private collection

Detail of *Flora meretrix*, ca. 1590



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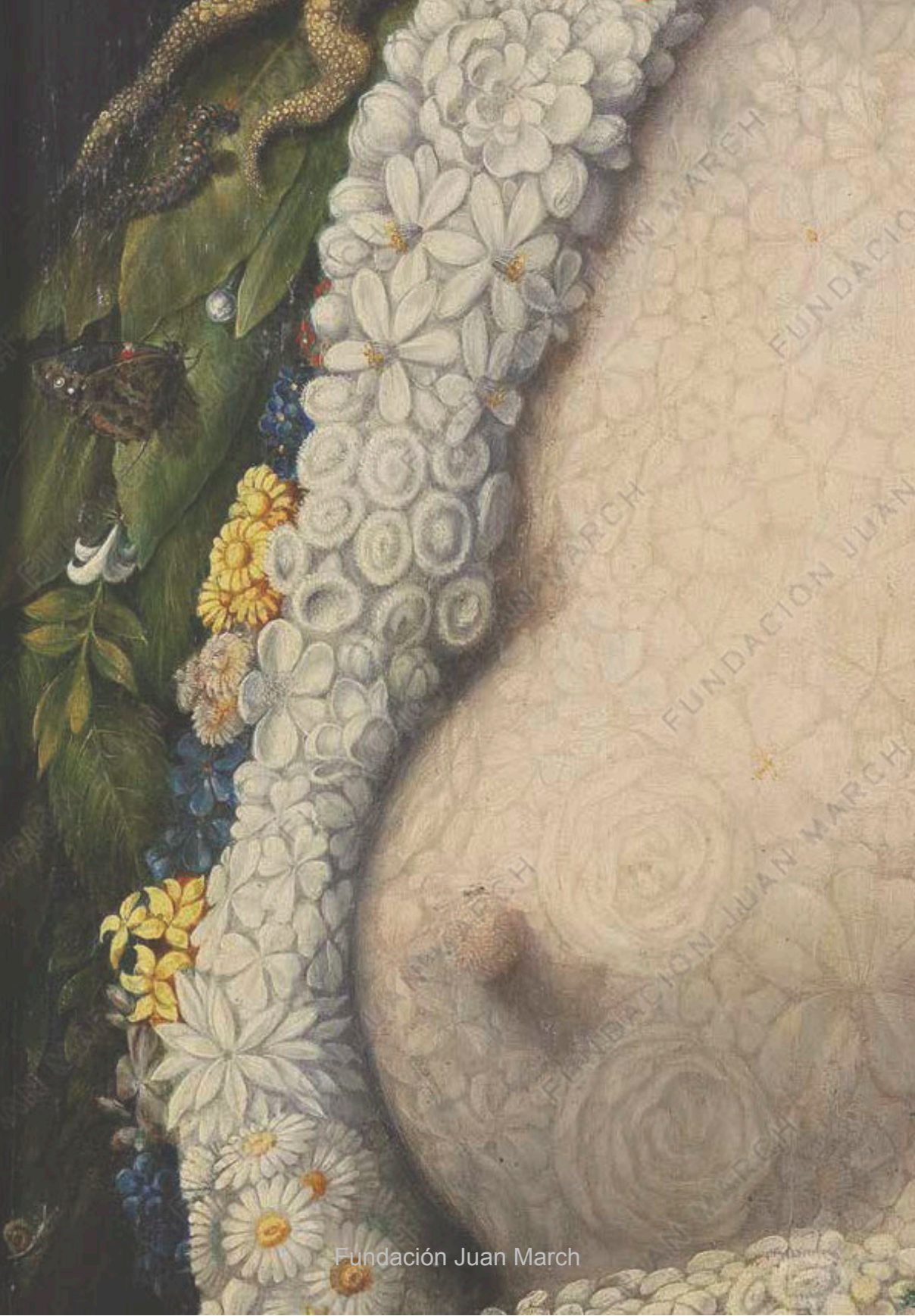

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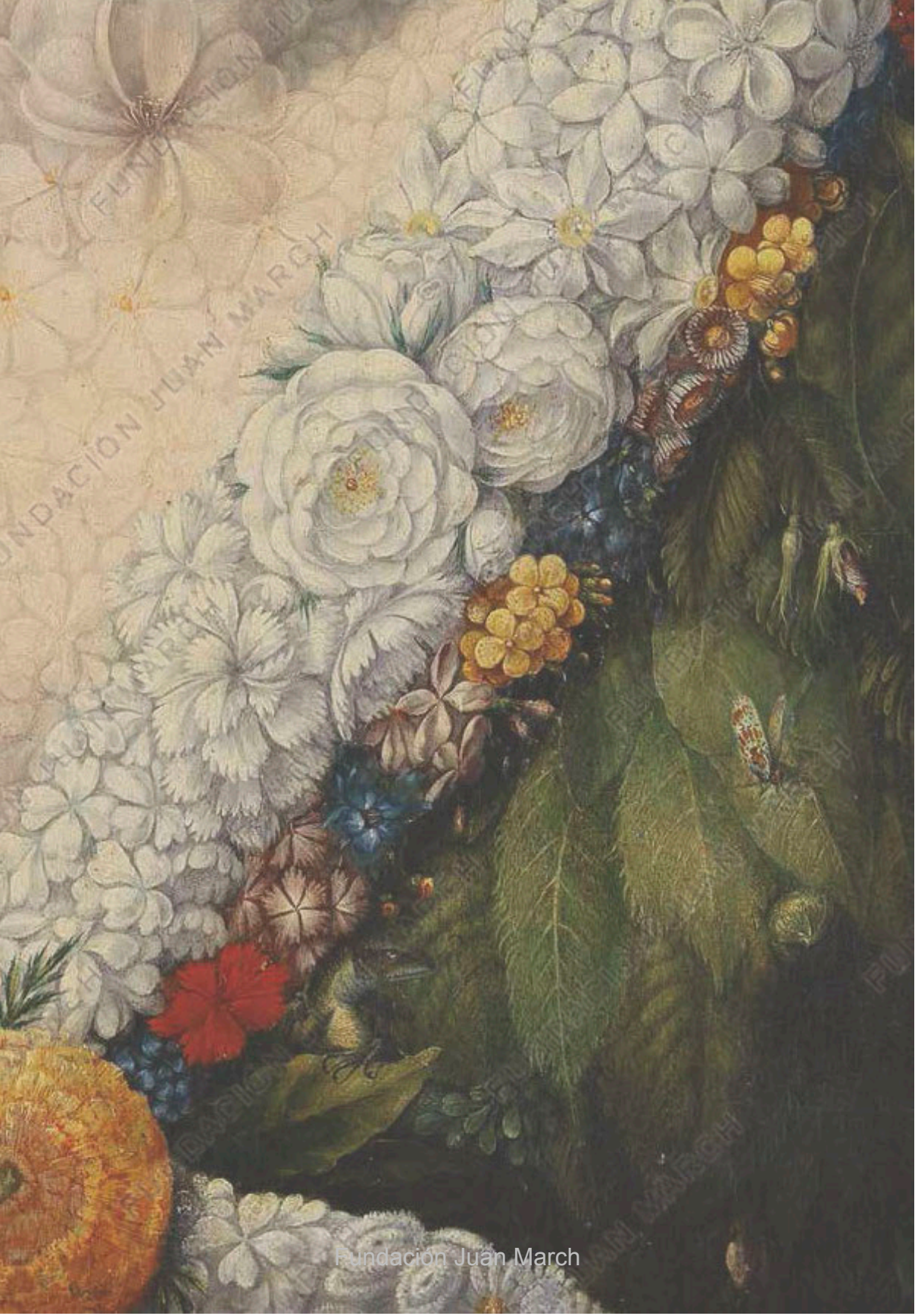

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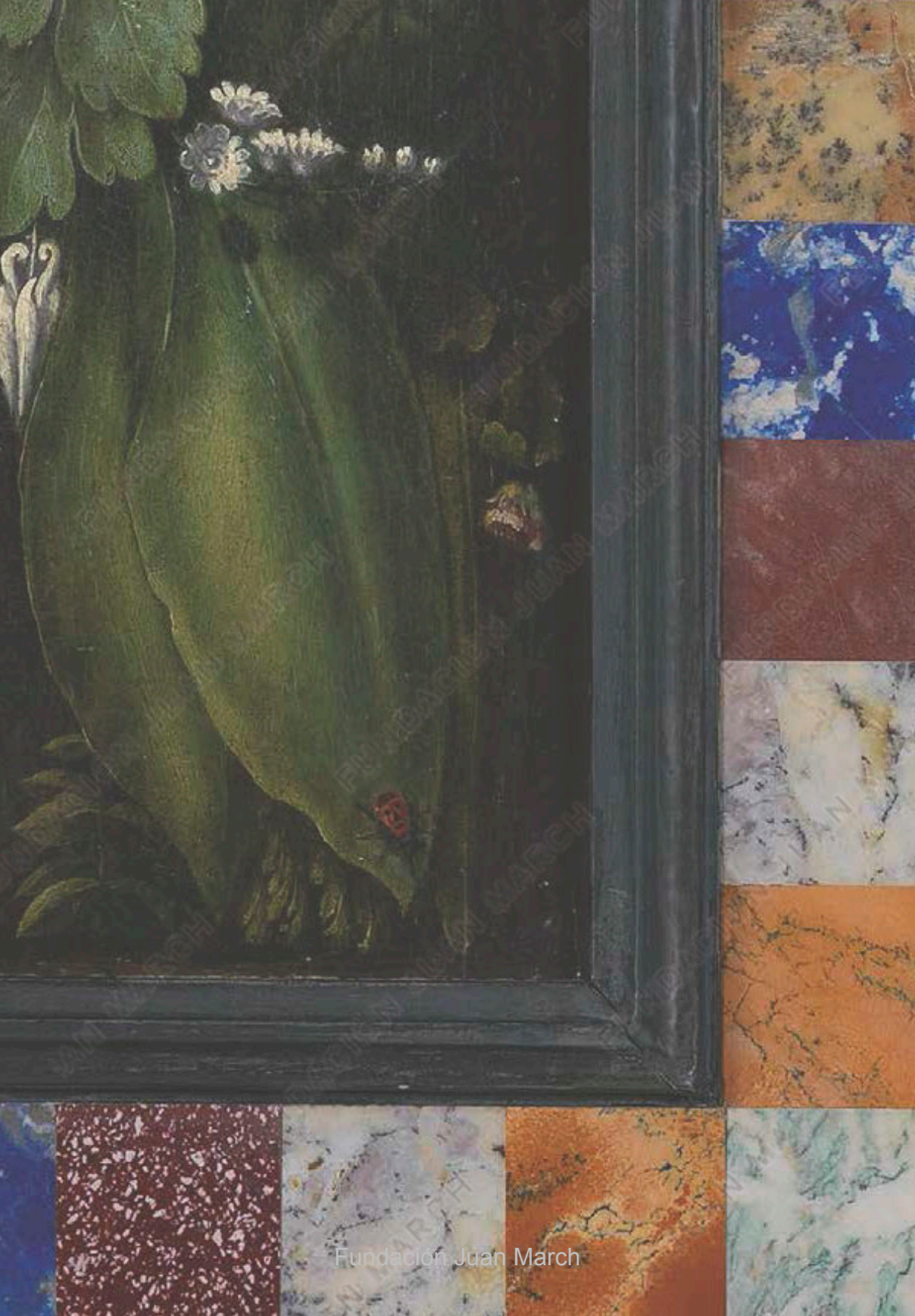

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Giuseppe Arcimboldo
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Private collection

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