

Wonder, Riches, and Mining: *Handstein* by Caspar Ulrich (c. 1555–1576)

Abstract

Mining also had its place in the courtly art world. *Handsteins*—literally: “hand stones,” or stones the size of human hands—were decorative objects carved from large pieces of mined ore. *Handsteins* were mounted on metal stands and adorned with figurines and other ornamentation in order to depict mining activities, Biblical stories, or religious scenes. This *Handstein* by Caspar Ulrich combines a mining scene on the bottom with a crucifixion scene on the top. *Handsteins* were popular among German collectors in the sixteenth century and were therefore represented in many princely *Wunderkammern*. Their appeal derived from the fact that they literally symbolized the richness, or mineral wealth, of a land. That this wealth was wondrous and seemingly God-given conferred a certain divinity upon land, ruler, and people alike. Ulrich’s *Handstein* dates from the second half of the sixteenth century; it was made from ores mined in St. Joachimsthal, a storied mining town in Bohemia (today: Jáchymov, Czech Republic).

Source



Source: Caspar Ulrich, *Handstein* with mine and crucifixion of Christ. 3rd quarter of the 16th century. Silver, gilded, silver luster, minerals, enamel, glass. Kunstammer, Inv. no. 4157. Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna. Available online at: www.khm.at/de/object/24c4956895/

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Kunstammer

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