

Monica Lausch



Julius von Schlosser and Portraiture

Attributed to the circle of Leonardo
Da Vinci, Wax bust of *Flora*, pro-
file view. Berlin Museums

Although the Vienna School art historian Julius von Schlosser (1866-1938) is best known for his book of sources on the literature of art (originally published in 1924 as *Die Kunstliteratur*), portraiture was a subject that from around 1910 stimulated some of his most innovative investigations on topics that art history had largely marginalized including the history of portrait sculpture in wax, the traditions of rhetoric surrounding the interpretation of portrait miniatures and the portrait-bust as a monumental work of art. This paper will examine how Schlosser theorized the problem of portraiture from a multiplicity of angles. I shall discuss how his interpretation of wax portraiture, in particular, was informed by the presence of the wax portrait as a motif in fin-de-siècle texts and by modernist debates concerning the “museum-worthiness” of wax portraiture. Accordingly, aspects of Schlosser’s intellectual exchange with the Italian aesthetic philosopher Benedetto Croce on portraiture as an aesthetic problem will be presented in order to evaluate how Schlosser, through both his theory and museum practice in Vienna’s Kunsthistorisches Museum sought to re-establish the wax portrait as a genre of considerable significance long before Pop Art began to re-insert the wax sculpture into the mainstream of art history again. Some would argue that Schlosser’s *History of Portrait Sculpture in Wax* remains unsurpassed in the way that he redefined wax portraiture as an important category of art.

Monday 22 November

6.45 pm Room 148 Elisabeth Murdoch Building

All Welcome