

**E. H. Gombrich, Obituary of Julius von Schlosser, Burlington Magazine, Vol. 74, 1939, pp.98-9 [Trapp no.1939C.1]**

One of the most distinguished personalities of art-history has passed away: Julius von Schlosser—or Schlosser-Magnino, as he called himself after his Italian mother—died recently in Vienna, aged 72. Already in the early days, when he studied under Franz Wickhoff, he had chosen the line to which he remained faithful: that of scrupulous scholarship. His education in the strict school of the great historian Theodor von Sickel helped him in the pursuit of his task no less than later his personal friendship with Benedetto Croce. The need of a sound foundation for his subject led him to ever deeper researches into the texts which the art-historian is used to deal with—too often, alas, without the keen tools of historical and philological criticism. The final result of a lifetime of research was the fundamental work *Die Kunstliteratur*, embracing the history of all writing on art from classical times to about 1800. Written with the profound insight of first-hand knowledge, it is not only indispensable as a bibliographical reference book, but it is also one of the few works in our subject to be both genuinely scholarly and readable.

Schlosser however, was no mere philologist. The burning question "what is art?" was, throughout his life, his main concern. He dealt with it not in abstract speculations but always in connection with a tangible historical problem. It is characteristic of his method that he chose such an odd and out of the way subject as portraiture in wax for one of his profoundest investigations into the question of naturalism, its sources in magic and its aesthetic limitations. For the same reason not classical periods, but times of crisis such as the dawn and the waning of the middle ages, were his favourite fields. The result of his researches was a profound distrust in all easy-going aestheticism and formalism — a deep insight, that "art" means a different thing to different times and societies. Thus he established for the first time the decisive role that the formula or "simile" plays in medieval art and showed in his penetrating studies on the "International Style" how these patterns, inherited from late antique art, gradually approximate to nature. This research into the formation and change of styles was, however, to him only the propylon to a genuine history of art, dealing with creative individuals, not with the language of the many. It was this problem which occupied his mind in his last years. Before its main fruit, a monograph on his beloved Lorenzo Ghiberti could see the light, he left us.

Though one could, of course, proceed to a further enumeration of the results of Schlosser's work, one cannot but feel that his life yielded more than a sum of these scholarly achievements. Though he worked successfully for decades at the Imperial Collections in Vienna, taught there at the University, and finally even accepted with reluctance the directorship of the II. Kunsthistorische Institut he was not a specialist of the modern type — nor did he ever strive to be one. For any kind of specialisation his reading was too vast, his outlook too broad, his horizon too wide. It embraced literature no less than art and history and last, but not least —music. His horror of professionalism of any kind is reflected in every single line he wrote. Schlosser's style, this very cultivated, very personal style, consciously "oldfashioned," packed with allusions, which make every sentence stand in relief against the wide background of his enormous general knowledge, reveals the man in more than the ordinary way. In times like ours he chose to be an " anachronism " in the very best sense of the word.