



The Subject in Art: Portraiture and the Birth of the Modern

Catherine Sousloff

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Challenging prevailing theories regarding the birth of the subject, Catherine M. Soussloff argues that the modern subject did not emerge from psychoanalysis or existential philosophy but rather in the theory and practice of portraiture in early-twentieth-century Vienna. Soussloff traces the development in Vienna of an ethics of representation that emphasized subjects as socially and historically constructed selves who could only be understood—and understand themselves—in relation to others, including the portrait painters and the viewers. In this beautifully illustrated book, she demonstrates both how portrait painters began to focus on the interior lives of their subjects and how the discipline of art history developed around the genre of portraiture.

Soussloff combines a historically grounded examination of art and art historical thinking in Vienna with subsequent theories of portraiture and a careful historiography of philosophical and psychoanalytic approaches to human consciousness from Hegel to Sartre and from Freud to Lacan. She chronicles the emergence of a social theory of art among the art historians of the Vienna School, demonstrates how the Expressionist painter Oskar Kokoschka depicted the Jewish subject, and explores the development of pictorialist photography. Reflecting on the implications of the visualized, modern subject for textual and linguistic analyses of subjectivity, Soussloff concludes that the Viennese art historians, photographers, and painters will henceforth have to be recognized as precursors to such better-known theorists of the subject as Sartre, Foucault, and Lacan.

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