FOREWARD

In recent years regional studies of American art have increasingly been recognized as a powerful tool for examining our shared culture history. These studies raise questions about the practice of using broad patterns of cultural development—usually based on events in a few major cities—as the principal interpreter of local history. Scholars have instead found it useful to reverse that methodology by analyzing the forces guiding the creation and evolution of regional art at its source. The symposium, "Cleveland as a Center of Regional American Art," followed the latter course by investigating the specific and unique circumstances that generated Cleveland's rich visual arts tradition.

Some of my colleagues initially greeted the idea of a two-day symposium dedicated to Cleveland art with skepticism. Fortunately, the concept was nurtured by a small cadre of individuals at the Cleveland Artists Foundation, an organization dedicated to researching, exhibiting, and preserving the region's artistic heritage. This group would be invaluable to the project's realization, especially during the early planning stages when I occasionally wondered whether we were all slightly delirious, inspired more by naive enthusiasm than by clear-eyed reason. I did not know then that I would be irresistibly carried forward by the energy, intelligence, and ardor of this dedicated group, and for their support I offer my deepest gratitude to William Busta, Ann Brown, and Nina Gibans.

When the call for papers was announced no one knew precisely what response would ensue. Then proposals came pouring in from experts in diverse specialities, living as far as London and as close as Oberlin. The range of their research was astonishing: painting, sculpture, furniture, ceramics, architecture, city planning, industrial design, toys, advertising, photography, the Kokoon Club, the African-American artists of Karamu House, painters influenced by environmental concerns, and other facets of Cleveland's diverse artistic community. As the organizers of the symposium, we soon realized that the two-day schedule would never accommodate everyone and that, to our great regret, many deserving papers could not be included. As practical compensation, the symposium was tightly scheduled to allow for as many presentations as possible and a time limit was set for each lecture. The latter ultimately caused some minor inconveniences during the actual presentations, but without preventing the symposium from proceeding to a successful conclusion. In the end, we were all profoundly impressed with the quality and variety of the papers, which if nothing else, affirmed the rich complexity of Cleveland's visual arts tradition.

Many individuals and institutions were instrumental in the symposium's successful implementation. The Cleveland Artists Foundation would like to thank all the lecturers, as well as the presenters of each session. Perhaps the most satisfying aspect of the weekend was the tremendous public enthusiasm, expressed partly through the advance registration of every seat in the hall over a week before the symposium opened. (It is a safe bet that anyone who questions whether the public is interested in Cleveland art did not attend the Saturday afternoon session where admittance was strictly for standing room only.) Others demonstrated their support by volunteering their time, contributing toward the expenses, and participating in the discussions. For their assistance we are very grateful.

The Cleveland Artists Foundation extends its appreciation to The Cleveland Museum of Art for use of its facilities. We are especially grateful to Robert P. Bergman, the museum's Director; Katherine Solender, Curator of Special Programs; Nancy Seitz, Special Events Coordinator; Lisa Battista, General Manager of the Museum Cafe; Fred Janesch, Supervisor of Audio-Visual Services; Michael St. Clair, Audio-Visual Assistant; and the Security Staff.

Above all, the symposium was made possible by the generous funding of the Cleveland Foundation, a civic-minded institution that understands the necessity of researching and documenting Cleveland's artistic heritage. The significance of that activity was affirmed by the symposium lecturers who noted the difficulty of locating works—including seminal works by leading Cleveland artists, as well as how much has already been lost. The Cleveland Artists Foundation is, therefore, especially grateful to Kathleen Cerveny of the Cleveland Foundation for acknowledging the significance of our struggle to preserve Cleveland's cultural heritage so that it may be understood and enjoyed by future generations.

William H. Robinson
Symposium Advisor