Surprisingly little has been published on the impressive mosaic murals in the rotunda of the Cincinnati Union Terminal, considering their unquestionable artistic quality and the outstanding building they are part of—the terminal was the largest unsupported half-dome in the world when it opened in 1933. Art historian Gretchen Garner sets out to fill this gap with a lavishly illustrated account on the genesis, reception, and dramatic fate of the murals after the train station ceased its function as a state transportation hub in 1972. How can we critically evaluate the mural, its narrative of American cultural history, and its contribution to the visual archive of international modernism?

Garner’s concise *Winold Reiss and the Cincinnati Union Terminal* offers a convincing three-part structure, starting with a description of the murals, followed by a biographical overview of the German immigrant artist Winold Reiss, and ending by situating the murals in the art history context of the 1920s and ’30s. In addition, Reiss’s fourteen colorful industrial/worker murals, which are closely related to the history Cincinnati, the two enormous mosaic murals following the curve of the rotunda murals (each 105 feet wide and 22 feet high) rank among the most impressive contributions to the design of the terminal, now the Cincinnati Museum Center.

The rotunda features a realistic foreground dominated by larger-than-life mosaic silhouette figures ranging from Indians and settlers to workers and engineers. While the murals have no official title, they clearly combine historical references to the city of Cincinnati and the history of transportation. Reiss described his composition:

The panel on the left [the south mural] expresses symbolically the development of our country from the early Indian days to our late industrial era. In the background, I have portrayed the history of transportation, so important a feature in the American scene. The Indians on the left represent the original inhabitants of America who greet the healthy and virile pioneers coming over prairies. In the pioneer group, which includes a typical
pioneer family, I have tried to express the courage and fortitude of the man; the loyalty and love of the mother; the wondering romance of the past and future in the eyes of the boy. All these qualities are the foundation upon which America stands. (15–16)

Clearly, in his depictions, Reiss offers his interpretation of European-American encounters, progress, and future aspirations. As Gretchen Garner points out, when Reiss won the commission for the mosaic murals in 1931, he had just become a naturalized citizen. The importance of becoming an American can hardly be overestimated. Reiss had been fighting for his right to proudly proclaim “I am an American” by painting in the spirit of “We the people,” emphasizing racial equality. With citizenship papers in his hands, he felt comfortable remapping the history of American civilization as a bold success story emphasizing his personal vision of “America,” which continues to inspire visitors of the building.

Garner traces the biography of Reiss, born on September 16, 1886 in the German city of Karlsruhe. In 1911, Reiss enrolled in the Akademie der Bildenden Künste Munich (Academy of Fine Arts), studying with the famous art nouveau painter, sculptor, engraver, and architect Franz von Stuck. In the same year, he also attended the Kunstgewerbeschule (School of Applied Arts) studying with the influential painter, designer, and graphic artist Julius Diez. After his arrival in the United States, Reiss quickly established himself as a creative force in downtown Manhattan. Despite his initial success with enthusiastic activities at his New York studios and the publication of a stylish magazine, Modern Art Collector (1915–17), he became disillusioned with life in the American metropolis. The vision of a democratic unity of people from all corners of the world proved to be merely a mirage. Ethnic ghettos, intolerance, racial disrespect, chauvinism, and a general sense of cultural hierarchies ran counter to his expectations of equality.

Garner includes a variety of Reiss’s ethnic portraits, including the African American writer and poet Langston Hughes, the Japanese American sculptor Isamu Noguchi, a drawing of Zapatista soldiers from Mexico and a number of impressive portraits of Blackfeet Indians, which partly served as models for the Cincinnati mural. I have argued elsewhere that Reiss’s use of bold colors in his portraits goes beyond obvious references to the world of painting and can be read as a coded message regarding a critique of the racial color line. Reiss did not choose to become an outspoken activist against racial segregation, lynching, genocide, and white supremacy. Instead, he used his art to encode his longing for an “America” that would live up to its democratic promise of equality.

Given his particular interest in ethnic diversity and intercultural confrontations, it is surprising that Reiss chose to tell an optimistic narrative in the murals from a mostly white perspective. While Garner acknowledges the “thousands of unsung heroes of the great project of laying the railway across the country,” she refrains from investigating the lack of Chinese workers and other groups, such as African Americans, in the American history of progress (23). While Indians play a crucial role in the mural, Reiss chose to stage their first encounter with white settlers as peaceful and harmonious. Garner acknowledges that this “section of the mural might seem to most unresolved, because it seems to slight the very real conflicts or at least differing interests between the Indians and settlers” (24). Indeed, as an artist with a clear task and his own dedication to a pacifist, humanist agenda, Reiss may have had conflicting loyalties.
In addition to an outline of the murals and a description of Reiss's aesthetic concept of color in a literal and ethnic sense, Garner's highly readable discussion of the murals covers a wide range of art historical contextualizations, from symbolism, art nouveau, and Der Blaue Reiter to art deco, cubism, Mexican murals, and American regionalism. Particularly revealing are Garner's comparative readings of Thomas Hart Benton's America Today (1930–31) and Diego Rivera's politically charged fresco mural series Detroit Industry (1932–33). Garner wonders about the lack of anger or dissatisfaction with the shortcomings of the American promise of democracy in the mural. As explanation, she refers to the gratitude Reiss might have felt as a newly naturalized American citizen and notes that he "seemed to appreciate the freedom he felt in the United States, and the whole array of American types" (132). In order to understand how Reiss must have struggled with his status as both cultural insider and outsider, it is crucial to read the murals in conjunction with his ethnic portraits. No doubt, the richness of the artist's biographical background and the complexity of his oeuvre as a teacher, muralist, designer, illustrator, portraitist, and painter can only be skimmed in a 160-page book with 77 illustrations. All considered, this publication does great service to both the general reader interested in the strikingly complex background of Reiss's murals on American progress and transportation at the Cincinnati Union Terminal and the academic who is sure to find a novel and fascinating visual archive of European American modernism.

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What Can and Can't Be Said
Race, Uplift, and Monument Building in the Contemporary South
Dell Upton

This study went to press just as Americans waded into a very public and divisive national discussion about the presence of Confederate monuments in public spaces, following the murder of nine African American women and men at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. Since the summer of 2015, numerous Confederate monuments have been removed in cities such as New Orleans, Baltimore, Memphis, and Dallas. In this timely and well-argued book, Dell Upton analyzes the extent to which this commemorative landscape and the racial politics it long reinforced influenced the construction and dedication of monuments devoted to the civil rights movement since the 1970s.

Through a number of detailed case studies, What Can and Can't Be Said explores the challenges that organizations and municipalities faced in their efforts to commemorate the civil rights era. While Upton reflects on the aesthetic form these new monuments and memorials have taken, he is primarily interested in how artists and their supporters navigated public committees and other stakeholders who often embraced competing memories and ideas about slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the civil rights movement. According to Upton, these artists were forced to work