

The unveiling of new art museum buildings has become almost commonplace in recent years. This is a phenomenon observed throughout the world, yet it is remarkably apparent locally, too. Indeed, in Cincinnati—one of only a dozen American cities that can boast three major art museums—all three museums are opening new buildings or making major renovations in 2003.

Yet I will make the claim that the current moment for the Contemporary Arts Center is an extraordinary one. For, though we inaugurate an exceptional building in the Lois and Richard Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art, it is not a building alone that we celebrate. We are marking the triumph of the progressive values of innovation, diversity, and free inquiry that have sustained this institution for sixty-four years. It is those values that have made the museum a symbolic touchstone for many people in our region and that are, in turn, symbolized by the Rosenthal Center. They lie at the heart of the CAC's relationship to its city and its audience, and they are at the core of today's most significant art.

Director's Foreword

A few friends of the CAC have expressed uneasiness about the title of Senior Curator Thom Collins's inaugural exhibition. Certainly, there are many people in our city and our nation who yearn for "somewhere better than this place," whether in terms of social and economic equity, racial harmony, or even more elusive dreams. The primary argument of the exhibition and this book, however, is that one role of contemporary art museums is to provide a site where artists can "try out" utopian options. To the extent that the CAC can perform

that function, it is, *ipso facto*, a better place than a mere building, no matter how engaging.

In creating the Rosenthal Center over a period of seven years, the CAC and architect Zaha Hadid and her team have carried on a rich dialogue regarding the function of art and the art museum in contemporary culture. Moreover, the unremarked but enriching diversity of the team further contributed to an atmosphere of discovery and growth.

The questions with which we have grappled regarding the relationship of contemporary art to community, of a quasi-civic building to an active business district, of physical interaction with intellectual and aesthetic instruments—parallel and reflect topics that engage artists at this same time. Collins, who joined the team in the final stages of the project and therefore has the newcomer's clarity of vision, sees our work as dedicated to the creation of "alternative social experience." He has identified four principal artistic methodologies as representative of this same tendency, which he calls 1) the social construction of identities, 2) discourses of social order, 3) changing patterns of social relations, and 4) sublime social encounters.

The museum of today must be prepared not only to contain and present such art, but also to embrace and employ these same strategies. That is the lesson of Zaha Hadid's remarkable building, and of this essential exhibition.

For the members and the Trustees of the Contemporary Arts Center, as well as for myself, I extend the deepest grat-

itude to Thom Collins and the team that assisted him in developing this exhibition over the past two years: Matt Distel, Tom Allison, Sue Spade, Andy Stillpass and the entire staff of the CAC. The exhibition would not have been possible without the enthusiastic support, both financial and intellectual, of Lois and Richard Rosenthal. Additional support was provided by the AT&T Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation.

I also thank the many individuals who provided material assistance to the curator and the CAC who are acknowledged elsewhere in this book. Finally, sincerest appreciation is extended to the artists in the exhibition, without whose insights this museum could not exist and our culture would be impoverished.

Charles Desmarais

Alice & Harris Weston Director