

Cleveland Museum of Art
Director's Letter to Members
April 1999

Dear Members,

First of all, you have this month plus two days to experience Diego Rivera: Art and Revolution. Like so many great artists, Rivera was an enigmatic person—the novel combinations of cultural and artistic themes in his work contribute to his multi-faceted appeal. Don't miss this opportunity to encounter the man and his work.

Looking further ahead, I want to bring you up to date on the exciting activities of the Art Museum Image Consortium, a hitherto little-known association of museums working to enable educational use of digital documentation of their collections. I am vice-chair of the board of AMICO, whose mission is to provide an art research capability the likes of which the world has never seen: to explore, via the internet, the collections of major museums all around the country—and eventually, around the world. The initiative is now in its testing stage with a group of university users and will be accepting subscribers in 1999. AMICO is a noncommercial venture designed to be used by educators.

AMICO's members currently include 26 major arts institutions from the U. S. and Canada, with that number to grow substantially soon. Each institution is undertaking to create thousands of "digital entries" from its collections. The AMICO library currently contains about 20,000 such entries, each one comprising a digitized color image of a work of art with text that provides basic information, plus, in many cases, additional art historical analysis. By 2002, the digital library should contain 250,000 images.

The possibilities for teaching are, of course, tremendous. The AMICO archive and similar tools will eventually replace slides. Naturally, this notion appeals to art historians such as myself. We envision searching the vast AMICO database to find the four or five objects that have in common some previously untraced thread. The possibilities for new discovery are great.

But in recent meetings, we on the AMICO board have come to realize that the true potential of this initiative in fact goes far beyond the needs of historians involved in research projects. We now understand the strong appeal AMICO will have to elementary and secondary school teachers, as well as to the general public. For example, not only will the searchable image library allow a third grade teacher in Nevada to explore major museums in North America to find Picasso Blue Period paintings—it allows him or her to do so in real time, with student participation, and to find out not only that the greatest Blue Period painting is Cleveland's *La Vie*, but also which Blue Period paintings might be near enough that the class could experience the real thing.

Our estimate of potential AMICO users by the year 2000 is 30 million. More to the point, AMICO could be on the forefront of reintroducing art education into elementary and

secondary school curricula around the country. With art education funding ever in peril, it may fall more and more to America's museums to provide our children the aesthetic literacy and cultural understanding that so enrich our lives and our communities. AMICO may help us do that. If you'd like an introduction to AMICO, visit the web site: www.amico.org.

Sincerely,

Robert P. Bergman, Director