In the summer of 1971 I began a hitch hiking journey from Vermont to California, not knowing how long it would take. Hitch hiking all night was immersion in anonymity. I remember throwing my thumb into the oncoming high beams. Success was a blaze of braking lights. I barely saw the outline of my Samaritan’s face, sometimes not at all until we stopped to refuel in the sleepless blare of a truck stop.

I relied on the generosity of strangers to keep moving me into the unknown. Each entrance ramp curb, where I waited with my camera tripod and small suitcase, was a new point under a new sky; a point I longed to move beyond.

Through the night I inched across the Pennsylvania darkness. When we crossed the border from Pennsylvania into Ohio at Youngstown, again I stood in the middle of nowhere. I belonged to the unpredictable. As I caught a ride into daybreak, I saw the sun shine on new country. Each motorist tempted me with the names of new places. Instead of pursuing a straight line to the Pacific I was drawn south and a driver, hearing that I liked trains, told me, “don’t miss Cincinnati.”

Thirty hours on the road brought me to the boulevard leading to Cincinnati Union Terminal. I stood astonished. I had never even seen a picture of Union Terminal. How could such a marvel exist without being famous? The only place I could see this marvel was here. I never made it to California.

I carried my belongings inside. What a shelter from the June sun. Mosaics celebrated a people on the move. The design of the ceiling was radiant. It took my mind off other worlds. I was spellbound until the station guard, Bill Hayworth, ambled over. I shook my head, “This is wonderful.”

“Yes it is, and if them walls could talk, they’d sure tell you somethin’.”

I got out my camera. This is what “them walls tell us. . . ”
The figures in the mosaics stand twelve feet tall. Many were modeled on site in Cincinnati, Reiss made many portraits of John Lester of Ludlow, Kentucky, an engineer for the Southern Railroad.
Reiss met Turtle and many others natives of the North Plains during his yearly art travels. A snapshot by the artist shows his son Tjark dwarfed by three Blackfoot, including Turtle on the right.
In instances where the mosaic is only partial ("silhouette") the color for the mortar sections is not mere surface paint. The pigment was mixed directly into the mortar.
A section of the rotunda murals portrays a pioneer family. The gulf between the artist's original sketch and Ravenna Mosaic Company's tour de force leaves us asking "was this sharpshooter a lefty or righty?"
Among the friends, relatives, and chance acquaintances Reiss sketched for immortality, Winold's brother Hans stands out like a Wagnerian hero.
Reiss photographed many workers on the construction site of the train station. The portrait of "York" is an insight to Reiss's admiration and delight in Americans of any color.

On the north wall of the rotunda Reiss situated three men to summarize Ohio River activity. The church between the biceps was St. Paul's Evangelical Protestant Church on Race Street.
The artist here dazzles us with a portrait of his son Tjark, a strapping teenager at the time. Forty years after completion of the 12,000 square feet project in Cincinnati, Ravenna Mosaic Company continued to stock the glass tesserae deployed in Tjark’s brow.
Reiss enlivened the 400 foot concourse with mosaic panels depicting local industries. On the west wall a map of the United States, with time zones, made heroic the destinations of millions.