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Philip Evergood and Ideologism in the 1930s

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“**Y**OUNG people should be early taught to distinguish the stops, commas, accents, and other gramatical marks, in which the correctness of writing consists; and it would be proper to begin with explaining to them their nature and use *.”

* ROLLIN on the Belles Letters, b. i. c. 1.

A. 24a

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Philip Evergood and Ideologism in the 1930s

BY KENDALL TAYLOR

Though not in the mainstream of American art, Philip Evergood (1901–1973) was an unusually talented artist. Labeled expressionistic, surrealistic, and even gothic, he was really an aesthetic lone wolf with a restless, quizzical glance, a slightly halting but resonant voice (distinguished by a trace of Etonian accent), and a somewhat suspicious manner that quickly dissolved into a sparkling and mischievous smile (fig. 1). Timidity was a characteristic foreign to his exuberant nature. He was proud to think he bore a strong resemblance to his paternal grandfather, one of Australia's most successful businessmen, who had evidenced "a great warmth and loving quality for those he respected, rich or poor, but also a testy, irritable capacity for those he felt were untrue, malicious, conceited or stupid".¹

He was introduced early to art by his father, Meyer Evergood Blashki, a landscape painter in the style of Henry Ward Ranger (1858–1916). His own art, however, was different from that of his father, and he candidly acknowledged this intentional dissimilarity. Speaking before the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1959, he explained: "Though a large bulk of my work deals with the humorous, the ridiculous and the bawdy . . . I am always associated in the minds of the critics and public alike, with the undernourished and emaciated members of our society. The symbol of the underdog has been my bundle and my banner. I wonder sometimes if my father's passionate concern with nature, with the trees, the sky, the rocks and the sea did not spark some kind of revolt in directing me toward the harder facts of life."²

1. Philip Evergood, "A Short, Intimate Biography of My Father", unpublished essay, February 1966, p. 1, Philip Evergood Papers, box 5, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (hereafter designated as AAA).

2. Philip Evergood, acceptance speech to the National Institute of Arts and Letters, 30 March 1959, Philip Evergood Papers, AAA.



Fig. 1. Philip Evergood and his wife Julia (1931).

Rebellion was part of his nature. His first serious artistic confrontation took place at the University of London's Slade School of Art, where his notions of appropriate subject matter and approach offended his instructors. In 1922 when he was supposed to graduate, his teaching certificate in drawing was held up, and it was only after one of his instructors spoke out on his behalf that the school reversed its decision. Subsequently, and throughout his career, he was at odds with the arts establishment, never gaining its complete acceptance. Even today, while some consider him one of the twentieth century's most original and profound artists, others dismiss his idiosyncratic and pseudo-primitive style as clumsy and uneven. His art has never possessed an easily defined quality and that has worked against him.

Evergood's early training at the Slade School was with Henry Tonks, a renowned draftsman under whom Evergood developed the sound drawing ability that underlies all his painting. Yet, though he could draw with the skill and precision of a Dürer, his interest was not only in recording physical impressions, but also in making a personal interpretation. "If you paint a picture of an old man," he said in a

1964 interview, “a beautiful old man with a beard and tired eyes, you’re painting something social”.³

The artist’s more natural inclination was towards a broad line, spontaneous and instinctively felt. Irregularities interested him most, and he sought a simple, natural approach in preference to an academic one. Especially impressed by Jules Pascin’s (1885–1930) feathery, wandering lines, suggestive of subtle variations in weight and volume, he chose like Pascin not to work out human proportions precisely. At the core of his line was the juxtaposition of opposites: of the bold against the uncertain, the well-defined against the vanishing. It was the combination of sharpness with softness that made a work exciting for him. Evergood considered the stylistic irregularities of his work a virtue in a world filled with swagger and self-assurance and felt it was the artist’s right to try all things, and to break established rules. In fact, Evergood regarded distortion, the discrepancy between ocular and optical reality and the artist’s conception of the reality, as interesting and valuable. He believed art was the most interesting when a few mistakes were purposely added. He was highly critical of those artists who took no chances with their work, people like Edward Hopper, who, he felt, “for all his beauty and honesty and depth of feeling and mastery of his simple technique and his one track mood and his *evenness* never quite stirred up any fever pitch of excitement”.⁴

Always experimenting with various approaches and techniques, Evergood painted not only what he saw, but also what he felt, often sacrificing formal balance for emotional impact. As the critic Elizabeth McCausland noted, nothing for Evergood was ever separate from the heart; he allowed his completed works to reflect the struggle that went into their creation. His was art too raw ever to be really fashionable, or as commercially successful as that of his contemporaries Jack Levine and Ben Shahn. With little entertainment value, it teetered continuously on the edge of excess. Nonetheless, although determined to follow his own artistic inclinations, Evergood also understood the difficulties of the path he had chosen. He told John Baur,

3. Interview with Philip Evergood by Forrest Selvig, December 1968, p. 51, transcript at AAA.

4. Philip Evergood to John Canaday, 22 February 1965, Philip Evergood Papers, box 4, AAA.

“My battle has always been to unite in my work the discipline, the order of tranquillity of the design with the excitement and impetuous statement I wanted to make”.⁵

Continuing throughout his career to pursue a unique style marked by irrational imagery, complicated handling of space, dramatic distortion and impressive spontaneity, Evergood also used highly emotive color to increase emotional tensions in the viewer. He believed that colors and forms could recreate emotional states and boldly applied colors in large areas incorporating raucous disharmonies of reds, oranges, and blues in his work. Similarly, he distorted forms and objects, relating them to one another according to a psychological perspective, making them large or small by virtue of their significance. It was all an intuitive process, especially the colors, and it came, he said, by closing his eyes and *feeling* the colors in his brain “a driving instinct at that moment for that piece of nasty green or clashing red”.⁶

Because the artist’s work was idiosyncratic in both approach and design, and frequently contained contemporary, topical images that Evergood often referred to as “tribal symbols”, many viewers have found his work difficult to interpret. Yet, while the public may not have wholeheartedly understood or embraced his work, fellow artists did. Many of his generation—Harry Gottlieb, Anton Refregier, Philip Reisman, Robert Gwathmey, among others—considered him to be one of its most talented members (fig. 2). He was also the most idealistic—this in an era when idealism evolved into “ideologism”.

Throughout its history the art world has abounded in isms—we are all familiar with them. A period noticeably lacking an appropriate designation, however, is the 1930s, when art and activism become synonymous for many, and artists become active in social issues and causes. And while the term “social realism” has been employed to define some individuals’ work from that period (including that of Philip Evergood), the term can correctly refer only to a very limited category of artists. “Social realism” emerged because the work it described expressed concern for society’s problems in a style literal enough to make the meaning clear. Artists such as William Gropper

5. Interview with Philip Evergood by John I. H. Baur, June 1959, p. 74, transcript at AAA.

6. *Ibid.*, 37.



Fig. 2. From left: Evergood, Anton Refregier, Juliana Force (Whitney Museum), Frank Kleinholz (Evergood's friend and lawyer), Robert Gwathmey, Yasio Kuniyoshi, in front of one of Refregier's Café Society murals (ca.1941).

and Ben Shahn fit well within that designation. Evergood less so. For while he is usually referred to as a social realist, his work has neither the agreeable form and easy-to-read qualities of Ben Shahn's art nor the literal subject matter of William Gropper's. A term that more accurately defines Evergood's work, as well as that of many of his contemporaries, might be the more precise designation "ideologism" from the word "ideology", meaning a systematic scheme of ideas full of visionary speculation about life. An ideologist, thus, would be a dreamer, or visionary, who advocates those ideas. Along with many other artists of his generation (people as diverse as Anton Refregier, Peter Blume, Walter Quirt, and O. Louis Guglielmi), Evergood can certainly be classified as such.

Ideologism, though not called that, was not a new concept in the 1930s. For centuries, European artists had used their art to vilify, ridicule, and protest against oppressive governments, corrupt religious orders, indifferent leaders, or the establishment in general.

Whether it was early artists such as Bosch, Brueghel, Holbein, and Cranach whose work criticized how life was, rather than presenting it as it should be, or twentieth-century masters like Picasso, Kollwitz, Grosz, and Beckman who illuminated and dissected corrupt forces in society, the blending of art and ideology has long been an inspiring and on-going endeavor.

It certainly appeared that way to a number of thirties artists who viewed themselves as the conscience of American society, and who banded together for common cause. A unique artistic period, the thirties became the "Golden Age" for many of these ideologists, when camaraderie was deep and intense, when there was total commitment to work at hand, and when the struggle to make a positive impact on society was the major goal. For many, nothing after ever matched up or seemed as valuable.

Their subjects, of course, differed in particulars from those of their predecessors: their work lamented the failure to bring black Americans fully into society, the exploitation of the working class, the effects of the Depression on the poor, the circumstances surrounding the Sacco and Vanzetti case, and the rise of Nazi Germany and world fascism. Peter Blume caricatured Mussolini, William Gropper did critical prints about sweat shops, Mitchell Siporin portrayed striking workers, Paul Cadmus drew lynchings, and Lynd Ward showed miners' lives in company towns with dead-end streets.

Evergood did it all, the titles of his canvases telling the story: *Mine Disaster*, *Lynching Party*, *American Tragedy*, *The Memorial Day Massacre*, *Fascist Company*; for him, ideologism was burden and banner. From his late twenties on, he saw himself primarily as an artist of ideas, focusing on the realities of contemporary life, communicating his vision about society's diminishment, and advocating its enlightenment.

He always viewed himself as an artist with an idea specific to each work. Underlying his art was the Zoroastrian premise that the universe is a battleground in which the negative forces of cold and darkness combat the positive forces of heat and light. Within this continuing battle, man, himself composed of both good and evil, is the deciding factor. Each of us must make the choice between life's forces.⁷

7. Evergood may have acquired this point of view from his mother, Flora, who was a serious student of philosophy in her twenties. It is reminiscent of the *Zend-Avesta*, according to which the world is a stage for unceasing conflict between the

Viewing the world as an ugly and violent place with man often the victim of circumstances and influences beyond his control, he painted his protagonists in a similar light—the disruptions in his art paralleling what he saw as the chaotic in life. “Life today is insecure and dangerous, so human character is uncertain and liable to malformation from social strain and stress. . . . Our workers are the hope of America, but they bear on their faces and bodies and in their souls the mark of the social distortion to which they have been subjected.”⁸

But Evergood clung to his belief that things could change for the better, and like Prospero in “The Tempest”, he argued that “the dreams of man and his imaginative concepts are a definite part of this life and man’s up-to-date reality. . . . If more people learned to accept reality and at the same time to accept the dreams, the world would be a happier, safer and more thrilling place to live in. The island in Shakespeare’s ‘Tempest’ holds no more dreams than our Coney Island if only you will look for them there.”⁹

The mission of the ideologist, then, was a serious one. Evergood felt that an artist hoping to make a contribution should be responsible for clarifying ideas in terms of the society of which he was a part. Specifically, a painter’s mission was to take sides in important world issues and to put across his view of them in the strongest and simplest way, with the greatest spontaneity of execution and freshness of color. Technical competence was “secondary to the fervor, the heat of desire to say something meaningful, strong, urgent and timely”.¹⁰

To chronicle the turbulent times in which he lived, Evergood filled his canvases with people who reflect its chaos. These awkward beings

powers of light and darkness, good and evil: it is man’s duty to assist the good power by resisting evil impulses in his own heart and by fighting injustice among men.

8. Philip Evergood, notes for his statement of artistic principle in conjunction with his exhibition at the American Contemporary Artists Gallery, Philip Evergood Papers, box 5, AAA. A revised version appears in *The Daily Worker* (New York), 2 November 1942, 4.

9. Philip Evergood quoted in “New Renaissance Forecast; Painter Hits Today’s Excesses”, *Daily Hampshire Gazette* (Northampton, Mass.), 3 May 1956. Unpaginated newsclipping from the artist’s scrapbook, Kendall Taylor Collection relating to Philip Evergood (hereafter abbreviated KTC), box 4, Syracuse University Library.

10. Philip Evergood, handwritten note, March 1966, unpublished, Philip Evergood Papers, box 6, file 7, AAA.



Fig. 3. Evergood in front of his Kalamazoo mural.

with their distorted faces and clumsy bodies represent the crises of life in twentieth-century America (fig. 3).

While he had always been interested in contemporary life as subject matter, it was the Depression that propelled Evergood from aesthetic questions towards a consideration of man's place in the social order. Prior to the Depression, social commentary in art had been confined to left-wing journals such as *The Masses* and *The Liberator*. But in the thirties, artists began to believe in their power as a social force and in their art as a vehicle for ideology. Along with other artists who used their art to effect social change, Evergood concentrated on significant moments in the lives of ordinary people, illustrating their life struggle and thus implicitly or explicitly criticizing the economic system. It was, in fact, this critical stance and the activist impulse inherent in their work that separated the ideologists and social realists from urban realists like Reginald Marsh. Marsh, although he captured the effect of the Depression on the unemployed and conveyed their hopelessness and despair, was more concerned with an abstract vision of urban life than with the individual's ex-

perience of it. His interest was in the spectacle; Evergood's was not. "When Marsh painted his Bowery bums," Evergood wrote, "he was seeing them through the eyes of a social observer and not through the eyes of a social thinker. Oh yes, Marsh saw the sadness and the unfairness and Marsh was sorry for the bums, but he accepted this state of society and this picturesque scene representing New York, as inevitable. Hence Marsh's bums are 'classical', 'acceptable' bums, acceptable as lost souls and classical in their tragic hopelessness. My bums, which I painted at the same time as Marsh, were dangerous bums, discontented bums, because mine had not accepted their lot. Mine were not congenital bums, but transient bums."¹¹

Claiming no originality for the differentiation, he classified all artists as either non-idea or idea artists. Constable and Pissarro, for example, he considered non-idea artists in that they did not value ideas as central to artistic expression. Instead, they received inspiration from visual sources; direct contact with nature evoked poetry and drama in their thinking. And it was out of these impressions that they conjured up the mysterious and exciting. The second group of artists, in which Evergood placed himself, drew inspiration from contemplating circumstances in which the underlying non-visual idea was the most critical element. "The painter of ideas", he noted, "does not have contempt for going to a leaf to study the intricacies of color or form, nor to a grand sweeping vista of fields and rivers. . . . It must mean that when the grand vista does not present itself, the idea artist has a little idea to play with and let his imagination work in and round out."¹²

Evergood's own ideologist works fall roughly into three categories. The first focuses on specific events or social issues in contemporary life, usually containing a condemnation of political systems and practices that victimize people and betray human potential. The second examines closely varied images of men and women self-diminished within a hostile environment. The third looks at all life as an endless cycle of trial and error, analyzing the human condition within a context of historical evolution.

11. Philip Evergood, "There Is A Difference in Bums", unpublished draft of an essay, undated, American Contemporary Artists Gallery Papers (hereafter abbreviated ACA Papers), roll D-304, frame 315, AAA.

12. Philip Evergood, handwritten note, untitled and undated, KTC, box 2.

Hoping that more intelligent and civilized life was extant on *other* planets, Evergood expressed his feelings about Earth's relation to the galaxy at large in a letter to Dr. Raymond Piper at Syracuse University. "There will always be," he wrote in November of 1959, "the heat of suns which will bring life and sustain it, and the thoughts of the 'good' generated out of this life or energy will tend to perpetuate light, life, and beauty. The negative forces—emptiness, cold, darkness—will always be present in nature and in man if the physical light or the mental light for any reason dims. Light, heat, growth, action, thought, creation, beauty, versus darkness, cold, death, frustration, destruction. Man has reached the point of discovering one or two important keys to the physical makeup of energy. He must decide now, today, whether he will use them to make for himself light or darkness."¹³

Evergood's spaceman in the Syracuse University-owned painting *Spaceman, Spaceman, Shining Bright* (1961), flying through the universe towards the unknown, perhaps has been propelled there by the artist to rendezvous with beings more intelligent than himself, those who have made the positive choice for light over darkness.

But whomever Evergood was interpreting and supporting, whether his bums during the thirties or the Spanish Republicans and the International Brigade he painted during the forties, he was sure to be on the side of the downtrodden and disenfranchised. Even as late as the 1960s he was still the outspoken rebel, criticizing the affluent who turned their attention away from the conflict in Southeast Asia, "escaping the horrors of war in Vietnam and elsewhere, hiding behind the barricade of suntan lotion, Puccini [sic] bikinis and rear-side uplift girdles while 98% of the Earth's population are living on a handful of rice a day, and rats are running all over the babies' cribs in Harlem and Kentucky".¹⁴ Always convinced of the futility of war, he continued to support anti-war groups throughout the crisis. Indeed, nowhere does his impatience with war-mongers and bureaucrats show itself more clearly than in his letters protesting the involvement in Vietnam. "The whole mess . . . is so revolting and

13. Philip Evergood to Dr. Raymond F. Piper of Syracuse University, 30 November 1959, Philip Evergood Papers, box 3, AAA.

14. Philip Evergood to Esther Aronson, 27 December 1965, Philip Evergood Papers, box 4, AAA.

gets worse by the hour and day. Protests don't seem to get through the barrier composed of concrete, red tape and manure. Those in the saddle ride rough-shod over all public opinion, and those opposed to these vile actions, the greatest percentage of people who hate the whole business, are too timid to speak out."¹⁵

With his ideologist leanings and his commitment to social criticism and commentary, came the danger of being too closely focused upon contemporary events. Yet Evergood was aware of the difference between being just a topical recorder of incidents and being a chronicler of his times, and he strove to develop what he called tribal symbols, symbols that would carry deep and enduring implications. For him, Chamberlain's umbrella had become a tribal symbol, as had tattered soldiers' boots and the white robes and masks of the Ku Klux Klan. Abstracting the topicality from these images, he adapted them to suggest the universal misery of mankind.

During the early thirties, Evergood's political stance brought him into contact with the American Contemporary Artists Gallery. The ACA pioneered the showing of socially-conscious art within an American context and quickly developed into a showcase for those artists whose views were sympathetic. Exhibiting the work of lesser-known artists and holding annual open competitions for unknowns, the gallery brought public recognition to Joe Jones, William Gropper, Robert Gwathmey, Moses Soyer, Anton Refregier, and David Burliuk, as well as Philip Evergood. Many of the ACA artists, particularly those born abroad or those who had studied in Europe, were familiar with and supported socialist and Marxist theory. Though Evergood generally thought of himself as a socialist, his was a belief uncomplicated by theory, based upon the moral rejection of any one class's exploiting another.

Evergood first joined the ACA roster in the spring of 1937, and his passion for mixing the aesthetically vital with the socially relevant brought him into a close and lasting friendship with the gallery's founder and director, Herman Baron (fig. 4). When Baron started the ACA in 1932, at 1269 Madison Avenue on the corner of 91st Street, it was to provide an office for his monthly trade paper *Glass Digest*, as well as a gallery. The first exhibition opened in August of

15. Philip Evergood to Alice and V. J. (no last name shown), 26 July, no year, Philip Evergood Papers, box 1, AAA.



Fig. 4. Herman Baron.

1932—a mere twelve paintings: works by Hy Cohen, Harry Lane, and Eleanor Blaisdel. Though the gallery also offered framing services, the exhibitions, concentrating on social realism, soon took precedence. Baron was encouraged in this socially concerned direction by one of his friends, a former fellow student at New York University, Harry Potamkin. A poet and movie critic, Potamkin introduced Baron to artists who were affiliated with the John Reed Club, an association of artists and writers that was a magnet for left-wing intellectuals during the early years of the Depression. For the most part in their twenties, these artists shared an interest in experimenting with new approaches and subject matter and in depicting subjects with proletarian and revolutionary themes. Generally, they found themselves unwelcome at the uptown galleries, which preferred works by more traditional artists. Until the ACA came on the scene, there had really been no commercial outlet for art that made a strong social comment, but it was exactly this kind of art that interested Baron. By exhibiting such works, Baron sought to involve his clients in the social causes as well, and he labored to attract people who had never before been to such a gallery. To attract the average wage-earner to contemporary art, he used a variety of methods. He sponsored benefits for causes, juried shows, auctions, opening celebrations, and music and street fairs—all to entice collectors, friends, and casual walkers-by to purchase the works of his young, socially committed artists.

Philip Evergood was one of the most outspoken of these artists, and certainly Baron's favorite. Steadfastly supportive, Baron not only served as Evergood's dealer, but also became his closest friend and reassurer. It was for Evergood's first one-man show, from 20 February through 6 March 1938, that Baron printed the ACA's first illustrated catalogue. The two saw each other frequently, often discussed subjects for canvases and corresponded regularly. Their letters, many of which are now at Syracuse University, indicate Baron's loyalty to artist over buyer. "[Harry] Abrams", Baron wrote, "came in and said he wanted to buy some of your paintings. . . . He asked me not to write you. He will try to get about two for as little as possible. See what you can do about keeping the price as high as possible."¹⁶ It is also clear, as one reads through what is at times a daily exchange of

16. Herman Baron to Philip Evergood, undated, Philip Evergood Papers, box 1, AAA.

letters, that Evergood both appreciated and greatly depended on the friendship of Herman Baron and his wife Ella. "What would a man do", he wrote, "without the inspiration of truly loyal friends such as you both. One can conquer the world if he has the kind of support and confidence in his little aims."¹⁷

Operating for some time as a cooperative, the ACA developed an annual tradition of inviting artists who had not had a one-man show in New York City to submit work for possible exhibition. Winners were selected and presented in a group show the following year. From this group show, one artist was chosen for a one-man exhibition the year after that. While Evergood had already enjoyed some degree of recognition before he arrived at the ACA, it was here that his work was first placed in a context in which he felt comfortable. By 1937, when Evergood came on board, the ACA had already moved downtown from 1269 Madison Avenue to a loft over the Village Barn at 52 West 8th Street in Greenwich Village, not far from Edith Halpert's Downtown Gallery and the old Whitney Museum. Evergood always recalled that location with fondness: "that rustic place of jollity, transient skullduggery and mayhem, where I had my first one-man shows, and the memory of which causes me to wake up from time to time in the dead of night—my head throbbing, my feet stomping—to the whine and hum of those hillbilly fiddles beneath the thin floor of 'our hallowed hall of art up there' ".¹⁸

Hallowed as well was the place Baron always held in Evergood's heart. The artist's closest relationship, outside that with his parents and his wife Julia, was with Herman Baron. Eight years older than Philip, Baron was friend, business manager, confidant, and dealer all in one. He was one of the few people Evergood totally trusted. When Philip's own father died, their friendship had matured to provide the attention and steadfast support that Philip, for all his "independence", so badly needed.

Baron, always totally loyal, placed Evergood's needs first, often refusing any commission for works sold, or advancing funds from his own pocket during low periods. "I have a feeling", he wrote in the mid-fifties, "that the extra money you had to pay for your car left

17. Philip Evergood to Herman Baron and his wife Ella, 17 September 1956, ACA Papers, roll D-304, AAA.

18. Philip Evergood, unpublished essay on Van Wyck Brooks, 11 February 1961, Philip Evergood Papers, box 5, AAA.

your bank balance a little less than respectable and so am enclosing \$200. Judging from what you told me you certainly will need money to see you through, so please let me know how much".¹⁹ Again some weeks later, "I hope I will see you before the week is out. It is a very long time since you've been in and when you're away that long I begin to wonder whether staying away from New York that long is good for you. Of course, we all have our ideas what is good for someone else and we are generally wrong about such things."²⁰

In 1941, when Philip developed intestinal cancer, Baron was the first to rally to his side, giving him continual encouragement and buoying his spirits by arranging for Juliana Force at the Whitney Museum to purchase *Lily and the Sparrows* for their permanent collection. This sale revived Evergood's interest in becoming well enough to resume painting.

During the fifties, when Evergood was living in Connecticut, he and Baron corresponded two or three times a week. Researchers will find the letters from this period, now at Syracuse, of particular interest. Essentially complete and very rich in information, they bring to light much detail about the New York City gallery business and the internal activities of the ACA. Besides letters from Baron to Evergood, the ACA material includes letters from Bella Fishko, Anton Refregier, and Dan Koerner concerning ACA business, minutes of ACA Gallery meetings, proposed ACA contracts between the gallery and its artists, and gallery press releases and exhibition catalogues. The material replaces an earlier ACA collection that came to the University through the efforts of Martin Bush in the 1960s and was transferred to the Archives of American Art in 1984.

The Baron–Evergood letters from Syracuse University's ACA collection testify that Baron frequently offered suggestions to the artist for compositions. The painting *Epitaph*, completed between 1953 and 1955, showing the Nazi's massacre of a village of Jews, resulted from one such letter. From his summer retreat, Baron had written to Philip: "In the country I have read a terrifying book, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto*. Last night I had a delayed nightmare. I dreamt that I saw a line of Jews—miles long, and they were being convoyed to a fiery furnace by a moving platform. As they reached the furnace they were

19. Herman Baron to Philip Evergood, undated, KTC, box 1.

20. Herman Baron to Philip Evergood, undated, KTC, box 1.

clubbed to unconsciousness or semi-unconsciousness. I heard groans as they were shoveled into the fiery furnace. This destruction of 6,000,000 people because they were Jews is almost forgotten. I hope you'll be able to do something with this slaughter of the innocent."²¹

Other letters kept the artist informed about gallery visitors and art purchases. Occasionally Baron would convince Evergood to accept a portrait commission. Although these assignments promised to provide much-needed additional income, they never seemed to work out. Inevitably, the sitters rejected the portraits, and ultimately Baron acknowledged the futility of the endeavor. "You can't be yourself", the artist complained. "There's someone standing back of you and advising you a little bit; it takes away the stamina and the staying power and the creativity."²²

Robert Gwathmey, Evergood's friend and fellow artist, recalled one such rejected portrait commission. Later retitled *Satisfaction in New Jersey*, the painting started out to be a family portrait of a doctor's daughter and her two sons, but was quickly refused. Gwathmey recalled how with "a minimum of repainting, adding some belching factories on the horizon, pumping some additional white corpuscles into the effeminate youths and making the mother-wife just a bit more of an ornament", Evergood transformed the portrait into a commentary on suburban life. Another rejected portrait commission is now in the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American Art under the title *Woman at the Piano*. It began as a painting of Bea Seitzman, the wife of one of Herman Baron's friends. As the work neared completion, Evergood began to doubt that the Seitzmans would like it. Writing Baron, he said, "I believe it to be a first-rate Evergood and it has all the subtleties of any of my best work—it is also very *like her* . . . they ought to be more than happy to have a major work for the small sum that [they] are paying. However, if they do not want it, I am sure it will stand up as good work of art anywhere, and will sell to someone just on its own artistic merits of a [sic] *Girl at a Piano*."²³

It was on Jack Baur's 1960 Whitney Museum retrospective exhibition of Evergood's work that Herman Baron's hopes rested for

21. Herman Baron to Philip Evergood, undated, KTC, box 1.

22. Jack Baur interview with Philip Evergood, op. cit., 8.

23. Philip Evergood to Herman Baron, 29 July 1953, ACA Papers, roll D-304, frame 84, AAA.

widespread recognition for his favorite artist. From the moment he heard that Baur, a former director of the Whitney, was going to curate the show, his correspondence with Philip was full of optimism. He wrote in July of 1958: "The news will be four or five days old, but I still find it thrilling. The invitation to you to show a retrospective exhibition is more than just recognition of your great talent. That, I am sure, was recognized by them several years ago, and you would have had the 'big' show then, had it not been for the fact that you are also the most articulated [sic] social artist and the climate has been inclement until now for them to venture forth with you. Now, evidently, they think it is safe; they have perfect barometers to catch the change or they wouldn't be where they are—which makes it good news generally. I almost feel like Noah must have felt when he saw the bird—was it a dove—he sent out bringing back the first inclination [sic] that the flood was subsiding."²⁴

But the exhibition did not bring the result both men had hoped for, and through correspondence Baron quickly tried to soothe the disappointment. "I have been thinking about our conversation", he wrote, "and I am inclined to believe that part of your tiredness, and mine too, for that matter, is the result of the reactions to the big event. No matter how good the results are—and the results have been very good—there is a feeling that things should have been more exciting. But if we consider the situation realistically, it couldn't have been. If you consider the biography and the reproductions, you are not only a social thinker but a fighter for social justice and this twin must retard your full acceptance; and if we add to that the terrific fight the non-objectivists are putting up to protect their investments and glory that is another hurdle to overcome. But, in having the retrospective exhibition you have achieved tremendous success; and the sales are very good and will be better, providing we continue our march upward steadily and soberly. The thousands who are seeing your exhibitions are a solid army and you can depend upon them to do missionary work."²⁵

Unfortunately, however, Baron's own tiredness was owing more to ill health than the anticipatory excitement and strain of the retro-

24. Herman Baron to Philip Evergood, 10 July 1958, written from Harbor Hill, Cold Springs, New York, KTC, box 1.

25. Herman Baron to Philip Evergood, undated, KTC, box 1.

spective, and in the months following it, his health steadily declined. On 21 January 1961 he succumbed to heart failure; he was sixty-eight, the same age Philip's father had been when he died, and Philip was badly shaken by his passing. With Baron's death, he lost an emotional and professional support he could not replace. Delivering the eulogy for his friend on 29 January 1961 at the Riverside Memorial Chapel, Evergood said:

I think there are many truths here expressed which have a bearing on our love for Herman Baron and on his character—human dignity, great warmth, fidelity to people and to ideals. His was a self-sustained sureness, a modesty, seeking no princely stature among his contemporaries, his fellow beings. When all the world was against him, against one of his artists, against one of his dear friends, he had a superb equanimity—in fact, he had a firmness of mind which was not easily disturbed either way—by prosperity or by adversity. To be near Baron—sick, failing even as he was during the last few months, was to be near strength, was to get nourishment, was to go away happy. I speak as I know I am speaking for all of you—his friends, his family, his artists—the people he loved. We have lost a dear, dear friend, and we weep today.²⁶

The Whitney retrospective was the high point of both men's careers. Baron's death marked the end of Philip Evergood's most artistically productive period—his years at the ACA.

THE KENDALL TAYLOR COLLECTION
RELATING TO PHILIP EVERGOOD

Size of collection: 8 linear feet
Inclusive dates: 1900–1988

The collection is focused on Philip Evergood (1901–1973), an American painter active from the 1930s through the 1960s, who is

26. Philip Evergood, ink draft of his memorial service for Herman Baron, 29 January 1961, KTC, box 1.

often associated with the “social realism” movement. These materials are particularly valuable in that they illuminate not only the life and work of the artist himself, but also American art and culture of the period. Acquired from Dr. Taylor by the George Arents Research Library in 1990, this collection complements the Evergood papers held by the Smithsonian Institution’s Archives of American Art in Washington, D.C. It includes some of the artist’s most personal items—those which during his lifetime he kept out of the public domain.

The collection is presently contained in seven boxes and two oversized packages. Boxes 1–3 and the packages contain Evergood primary materials—correspondence, drafts and recordings of speeches and essays, exhibition catalogues, reviews of his work, photographs, and personal memorabilia. Boxes 4–7 contain the materials of Kendall Taylor, the artist’s biographer, and drafts of her publications about Evergood, including her book, *Philip Evergood, Never Separate from the Heart*, a copy of which is in the Syracuse University Library. A more detailed inventory is available in the Arents Library.

A small amount of additional Evergood material may be found in the Philip Evergood Papers in the George Arents Research Library.