TO: WK Hicks  
FROM: M. Waskowsky  
DATE: Dec. 28, 1966  

Re: Reply?  
Yes  No

Since your last memo, I have talked briefly with Katie Hodgman - prior to her departure for a Florida vacation - about a number of pictures she viewed during a recent tour of the Chicago galleries. Her suggestions as to possible purchases for the Gilmore Room have been taken under advisement and, as soon as it is possible, we will make a trip to Chicago to look for new acquisitions. At the present time, we have a large number of works in the process of being framed for a forthcoming exhibition in February of recent college acquisitions in art. Perhaps some of the works in the exhibition will be equally suitable for the Gilmore Room, along with the suggested purchases made by Katie Hodgman.

As to the defense of the Evergood mural, we have attempted, since the receipt of the newspaper articles, to contact a number of qualified individuals for a knowledgable response to the mural and the art of Evergood in general - even Evergood himself. Rather than making a singularly lonely comment in the Index, we had entertained the hope of enlisting a concerted effort from several sources. However, the timing was not propitious, for the people solicited were either unreachable at the moment or asked for some latitude in time for a personal reviewing of the work before making a commitment. Thus the deadline for the last Index was not made, but some response is forthcoming, along with mine, and should be available, hopefully, for publication during the first part of January. Along with this intent, it seemed appropriate to invite Evergood to participate in the series of college lectures dealing with the theme of morality - in particular, morality in art. However the last hope did not prove to be feasible. In addition, we have scheduled for January - if at all possible - a brief film dealing with Evergood and his art, as part of the Art Department presentation of a series of films dealing with the arts to be given throughout the year.

In view of the wildly speculative assumptions being thrown carelessly about, the Evergood mural and the recent newspaper articles should be placed in a proper perspective devoid of journalistic distortions. Some sober reflection is in order. In the first place, as we originally noted, the story made fine reading grist for the journalistic mill and the writer fancifully embellished - with some relish - the "human interest" angle to enliven what would have been a perfunctorily reviewed acknowledgment of the recent publication of a book dealing with "The Graphic Works of Phillip Evergood". In the second place, it should be remembered, the writer, Rob Warden - formerly from the Kalamazoo Gazette - is neither by education or experience, a professional critic of art, In lieu of these marked shortcomings, his speculative assessments, fallaciously rendered, are of dubious value. It would appear that the ultimate aesthetic judgment of the Evergood mural is based on Warden's assessed valuation of the mural being worth $100,000 or more and further irresponsible speculation has recently parlayed the price to even a
quarter of a million dollars! In all fairness to the original journalistic premise, all that is stated is that, based on a size comparison with Evergood's current market value in terms of his smaller works, the Kalamazoo mural, with nearly 400 sq.ft. of painted surface, should have a relative evaluation of $100,000 or more. This assessment is predicated on the premise that, roughly speaking, a small Evergood painting—say of about ten sq.ft.—has a current market value of about $2500. However, unless you are dealing with commodities like wheat, steel, meat, the price per unit, while acceptably practical in the mercantile mart, is a fallacious index of value in its appraisal per sq. ft of aesthetic preciousness! If artistic value is decided at so many dollars per square inch or foot, then why is one of the famous "Hundred Guilder" prints by Rembrandt—scarcely the size of this paper—worth over $20,000 while another etching by Rembrandt—impressively four times larger in size—can be purchased for a mere $300? Why the discrepancy in price, if both are genuine Rembrandts, authenticated by experts? It should be obvious that the true difference lies in the aesthetic quality of the individual work and the assumption that the value of an artist's work rises in proportion to the square footage employed is a naive misusage of materialistic arithmetic.

Evergood's contribution to American art is to be found critically acclaimed in his smaller paintings and, in particular, his graphic works, in which his moral and social commentary is abundantly evidenced. He is not a mural painter, and, in this respect, his work in this art form will never approach the aesthetic quality of the Orozco murals at Dartmouth College or the Diego Rivera murals in the Detroit Institute. In his own estimate, there is evidenced a feeling that the Kalamazoo mural has its failings, brought about by the restrictions, he strongly feels, were inherent in the nature of the commission and its enviorment. The very quality that gives character and distinction to much of his smaller paintings and graphic work is restrained or submerged in the Kalamazoo mural. The mural is a good, honest artistic effort but not a great work, nor, by any means, a masterpiece of notable greatness, hitherto, unnoticed or overlooked by critical scrutiny.

If the last be true, then what is the particular worth of the mural? Certainly its value must be found in reasons other than the inflated price tag made by the quasi-assessment of a journalist's article. First of all, it is the work of a dedicated artist who will assume a remembered place in American art and, as a consequence, any of his works—whatever their value or significance might be—will be considered an interesting insight into the total development of his artistic expression. Secondly, the mural represents a point of view, a philosophy of art and expression of social consciousness, peculiar and
uniquely expressive of a particular upheaval and ferment in American life and culture—the era of the Great Depression.

In this last sense, the work will have a cultural and historical significance, which, as time increases, will be an invaluable reflection and document of the past.

On the above mentioned grounds, whenever confronted by students or faculty, we have consistently defended the work during our seventeen year tenure. In courses in art, whenever possible or pertinent, the mural has been discussed. Since we contact only a small proportion of the total student body in courses in art, we cannot hopefully educate every Kalamazoo College student in aesthetic sensitivity and responsive respect of art. Perhaps your personal assessment of the campus attitude toward the Evergood mural is correct but the art department cannot be charged with the stigma of conspiracy to rid the college of the work. If the occasion for its removal should ever arise, we will defend the right of the mural to continue its existence as a part of the college.