Philip Howard F. Evergood (American, 1901-1973)

**Pittsburgh Family, 1944**

Oil on canvas, 49” x 38”

Collection Tweed Museum of Art, UMD
Sax Brothers Purchase Fund

Philip Howard F. Evergood, *Pittsburgh Family*, 1944

Featured Works at the Tweed with Bill Shipley - a series of short gallery talks on work from the Tweed Museum of Art Permanent Collection

Philip Evergood (1901-1973) was an American painter who documented urban life and the plight of workers in a rapidly industrialized society, and it is this theme that makes his painting Pittsburgh Family so engaging and poignant and ultimately one of his greatest paintings on this subject.

Painted just before the end of World War II when the steel industry was pivotal to the war effort and when Pittsburgh was known as the “Steel Town”, it depicts a family in the midst of the cycle of making steel - from the ore on trains to the molten iron and the skeleton of a building. There is a visual “heat” to the entire painting that only clears at the very top of the picture in a range of mountains.

But it is the family of three that brings us to the heart of Evergood’s work - not to mention a family of birds making a nest and feeding baby birds alongside this family portrait.

Evergood was an especially verbal artist and he wrote essays and articles on art throughout his life. In Pittsburgh Family he describes how the people interested him more than anything else. He writes “Though my work deals with aspects of the grotesque, the humorous, the sweetness and the light, I am really looking at the human situations”. And he writes about the acid colors in the clothing of the family that makes their joy and pain even more intense. By idealizing their faces as though they are wearing doll-like masks Evergood adds a biblical and religious dimension to their situation. Evergood is known for mixing fantasy and realism in equal parts along with political and social ideas in his work.

“Sure, I am a Social Painter!” is the title of a magazine article Evergood wrote in 1943, a year before Pittsburgh Family was painted. I feel it is his optimism and his sympathy for his subjects that keep this painting from being just a comment on an industrial environment.