

1109 Alice Street
Modesto, California
January 2, 1957

Mr. Rene Vayssie
1977 Clay Street
San Francisco, California

Dear Mr. Vayssie,

I wish to thank you for your stand in rejecting the Flame and Phoenix design for a mural in the Marina Library.

When I saw the sketch at the Art Festival I was appalled that this, of all the excellent designs submitted, should have been chosen. It was so far below the standard that it should hardly have been exhibited with the others.

I am a librarian. The thought of having to work, read, or study in the same room with that design as a tapestry — a design essentially one huge glob of flame-red -- a pendant bonfire — gives me gooseflesh.

You would not be able to escape it anywhere in the room. No matter where you were that red glob would grab at your eyesight. No one could read in decent comfort in that room. As a further outrage to aesthetics it was to be situated immediately next to a fireplace! A fireplace is a delightful addition to a library — but with two fires going at the same time -- Ye Gods!

I am certain that the members of the jury and the Art Commission are not and never have been library patrons. The faults of the design for the function it was to serve are so obvious! Their claims to years of the study of art and deep knowledge are extremely dubious.

I enjoy and appreciate abstract art. In the private library where I work there is always on exhibit one of the three abstract paintings and two pieces of sculpture that I own, purchased from San Francisco galleries. The merits of abstract versus realistic art are not the question for debate. The question is simply one of what is good art and good taste, and Mr. Adams' design was neither.

A friend who saw it described it as a 'gallery shocker' — an attempt by an artist with nothing to say to get attention.

Thanks to you it will not be allowed to become a library shocker.

Your critics are unwilling to defend or to debate the merits of the design; rather they drag the red-herring of clichés — 'Our Civic Pride' and 'Our Cultural Heritage' across this matter.

Mr. Stearne has criticised you in unsentlemanly terms for rejecting this 'owing to the fact that the tapestry would have to be woven at the Aubusson Tapestry Center in France.'

If this is 'small-minded chauvinism' then I have a good case of it too. I resent the fact that this much (too much) tooted 'prize' — a paltry \$2,000. for model, completed and installed work — should not go to a local artist in entirety for complete execution of the work. It is one thing to produce a work of art, and quite another to commission it to be done from a sketch, as was Mr. Adams' intention.

Mr. Stearne's protests about San Francisco being a cultural center ring rather hollow if he sees nothing inimical to the cultural heritage in not producing the work in entirety locally.

A library embodies the works of the mind and spirit of man through all the ages: it is a rightful place for painting and sculpture to be. But to choose a work for a library which in nature is destructive to the enjoyment of books and reading — which screams 'look at me' — is quite wrong.

Again, thank you for your good taste and good judgement.

Very truly yours,

Benella Gallup
Miss Benella Gallup

Copies to —

Mr. Eric Stearne
Mr. Frederick W. Quandt
Elizabeth Quandt
Henrik Bull
Mr. Alfred Frankenstein
The San Francisco Art Commission
The San Francisco Library Commission
The Editor, San Francisco Chronicle