HISTORY ASSOC. PROF. STEPHEN SCHLOESSER, SJ, RECEIVES CURATORIAL EXCELLENCE AWARD FOR MCMULLEN ROUAULT EXHIBITION

CHESTNUT HILL, MA (February 2009) -- Stephen Schloesser, SJ, associate professor of history at Boston College, has received the Award for Curatorial Excellence from The Apple Valley Foundation for his work on the recent McMullen Museum exhibition "Mystic Masque: Semblance and Reality in Georges Rouault, 1871-1958."

The Curatorial Excellence Award acknowledges and rewards superior work in the field of curatorial studies and, by way of a $10,000 grant, encourages curators and artists to expand and improve on their ideas by visiting the shows and displays of their peers.

In 2008, Frances A. Bass, president of the foundation, and a second member of the foundation's board of directors, made unannounced museum visits to evaluate more than 30 exhibitions at locations across the nation on creativity, evocation, didactic qualities, aesthetics and physical presentation.

The award-winning exhibition, "Mystic Masque," comprised more than 180 of Rouault's finest paintings, works on paper and stained glass — many never before displayed in North America — drawn largely from the holdings in Paris of the Foundation Georges Rouault, the Centre Pompidou and the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.

Marking the 50th anniversary of Rouault's death, the exclusive exhibition aimed to recover the artist for a new generation by uncovering dissonant aspects of his work, which Schloesser argues have been obscured by "forced conventional consonances."

By displaying the many outward "masks" Rouault loved to paint — those of circus players, prostitutes and judicial figures, as well as the iconic sainte face (holy face) of Christ, definitively symbolized by the key figure of Véronique (vera icon) — "Mystic Masque" recovers the artist's keen sense of disjunction, unintended consequences and ironic reversals. Fr. Schloesser explained that "this irony — a sometimes bitterly satirical one — was often glossed over by a conventional piety in the presentation of his work from the time of his death in 1958 until the centenary of his birth in 1971."

Employing a second sense of "masque," the exhibition presented Rouault's representation of the human condition as a kind of "pageant" or "guising."
The exhibition was designed to show viewers that the act of judgment is central in Rouault's work: judicial figures must make their judgments based on limited appearances and not full knowledge. The innocence of criminals is frequently misjudged; the painted joy of clowns and prostitutes (filles de joie) is an intentional misrepresentation that leads the audience to misjudge these tragicomic lives.

As Fr. Schloesser explained, "Such dark reflections are redeemed for Rouault by the human masque's qualifier — 'mystic' — which points to the centrality of Christian iconography for the artist." Arranged chronologically, the exhibition seeks to demonstrate that Rouault's religious realism as it developed was far removed from any conventional piety. Rouault's human comedy is simultaneously a divine comedy; it is a masque—but one that is ultimately mystic.

The Apple Valley Foundation, of Apple Valley, California was founded in 1953 by Newton T. Bass and has supported various worthy endeavors, primarily in the Apple Valley area, for over 50 years.

###