THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.
TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

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PRESS PREVIEW: TUESDAY
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RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION OF THE WORK OF GEORGES ROUAULT,
FAMOUS FRENCH PAINTER, TO OPEN AT MUSEUM

Georges Rouault, the 82-year-old French artist who is the most esteemed religious painter in the world today, will be represented by about 160 of his works of art in all media in a retrospective exhibition to be on view on the third floor of the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, from April 1 through May 31. Officially sponsored by the French Government, the exhibition will contain 57 works of art never before shown in the U.S., and will include many media: oils, watercolors, ceramics, tapestries, enamels, and prints in color and in black and white. The show has been assembled, with the personal collaboration of the artist, by Monroe Wheeler, Director of Exhibitions for the Museum of Modern Art, who will supervise its installation. The section of the exhibition devoted to prints has been organized by William S. Lieberman, Curator of Prints for the Museum. The exhibition was shown at the Cleveland Museum of Art, with the help of the Hanna Fund, earlier this year.

A special catalog has been prepared by Mr. Wheeler with a foreword by Jacques Maritain, well-known French philosopher-critic and close friend of Rouault, who writes: "The exhibition...enables us to contemplate the steady, patient, unconquerable development both of the artistic and spiritual experience and of the immense work of Georges Rouault.... Rouault is now over eighty. He works harder than ever; and during the last few years he has completely renewed his manner.... These works of recent years are, in my opinion, the most invaluable jewel of the present exhibition."

A retrospective exhibition of the work of Rouault was held at the Museum in 1945, when a book by James Thrall Soby was published by the Museum. This is still the most authoritative work on Rouault in English, and from it are drawn the ensuing biographical notes on the artist. The current second exhibition seemed necessary because the war made numerous important canvases unavailable here at that time, and

because the postwar works add new stature to the artist.

The earliest of the present pictures was painted when Rouault was twenty. Eight were completed last year.

Mr. Wheeler says of the artist's work:

> Rouault's religious painting began in early manhood with story-telling pictures of biblical inspiration; he returned in middle life to the Christian themes which have ruled his imagination ever since.
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> In the meantime, in a powerful series of caricatural figures of prostitutes, judges and clowns, he expressed a tragic compassion or fierce righteous indignation not exactly religious but doubtless leading in the direction of theology.
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> During the first world war a certain wild joyousness in the manner of his painting, extreme simplification of design and rough handling of thick pigment, began to envelop the sombre content of his pictures.
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> Pathetic though the personages or the story might be, the visual reality upon the canvas grew more and more splendid and supernatural. There are few artists in the entire history of painting, none in modern art, who have delved so far into the resources of the palette. Apprenticed to a stained-glass maker in his boyhood, experimenting with ceramics as early as 1910, he transferred all that explosion of light and fusion of the spectrum to canvas and paper. At its greatest, the beauty peculiar to him calls to mind the royal and ecclesiastical treasures of the Middle Ages wrought in enamel and gems.
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> In spite of his recurrent handling of specific Christian themes - Ecce Homos, Crucifixions, Veronica's Veils - the greater aspect of his message is that of universal humanitarian fervor: pity for misfortune, horror of injustice, shame and self-condemnation as to one's own faults, transcending church and creed. His prototypes in the past are not the great church painters but rather the angry, mocking, sorrowing and exultant ones such as Rembrandt and Goya. In his graphic art, especially the great series entitled Miserere, the kinship to Goya is most striking. Here again we see his supreme originality and inventiveness in the technical sense. He calls them etchings and aquatints but really they deserve a category of their own, as they entail working methods without precedent.

Georges Rouault - Biographical Notes:

Rouault was born in Paris in May 1871. Of his earliest art instruction, which came from his grandfather, Rouault himself has written: "If I go back to my first childhood, I see myself armed with a piece of chalk, sketching large heads on the kitchen tiles or on the parquet floor of the old apartment of my grandfather.... He loved Courbet.... He loved Manet.... (I found among some old papers an invitation from Manet to see in his studios the works refused by the official Salon)."

At 14 Rouault went to work for stained-glass makers, an influence apparent throughout his whole lifetime of work. He attended evening classes during this period and, in 1891, enrolled in the Ecole des

Beaux-Arts where he became the favorite pupil of Gustave Moreau who helped him to find the true course of his art. Henri Matisse was a fellow student in Moreau's class. "I was only 30 when Moreau died," Rouault writes. "Then there was a desert to cross, and painting: the oasis or the mirage? Well knowing that I knew nothing - having certainly learned quite a bit between twenty and thirty, but considering that I perhaps did not know the essential thing which is to strip oneself, if that grace is accorded us after having learned much."

Shortly after Moreau's death Rouault became Director of the Musée Gustave Moreau, a post he held for more than 40 years. He already aspired to paint religious subjects, though he wrote that "when, toward 1894, I painted my 'Infant Jesus among the Doctors,' almost no one spoke of religious art." Religion was soon to become the sum of his personal experience and emotion. He found inspiration particularly in the work of the Catholic writer Leon Bloy (1846-1917), of whom Rouault said, "He vomits his epoch" - words that might equally be applied to the artist. Throughout his life he has been a solitary worker, traveling little and taking little part in the art movements of his times.

In 1903 Rouault helped to found the Salon d'Automne which fostered a religious revival. The public was alarmed at the blackness of tone of his work and at the disreputable aspects of his weary clowns and prostitutes, painted as symbols of earthly degradation and subjects for instant redemption through suffering, because of "an inner necessity and the perhaps unconscious desire not to fall full-length into conventional religious subject matter." His expressionism was psychological, emotional, protesting, as opposed to the decorative expressionism of the Fauves.

By 1907 he had developed most of the iconography he has since used throughout his career: landscape, prostitutes, the theatre, the circus and religious subjects. He now began to develop the interest in the qualities of pigment which steadily progressed to become so characteristic of his work in color. He also began several paintings of judges as symbols of bourgeois corruption, as they had been for Daumier.

Rouault married in 1908 and has had four children. He had his first one-man show in 1910 in Paris. During the first world war he was able to produce a surprising amount of important art. But in the post-

war decade he diverted much of his painting activity to the execution of a monumental series of prints, Miserere, for the publisher Ambroise Vollard, work which strongly affected his subsequent painting.

In 1929 Rouault executed ballet designs - one of which will be shown - for Prokofiev's The Prodigal Son commissioned by Diaghilev, and in the following year held his first foreign exhibitions, in London, New York and Chicago. He designed tapestries in 1933, two of which are included in the present exhibition. During the war he managed to continue painting, in a more serene vein, with blue prevailing in his palette; and immediately following the war he was commissioned with a number of other outstanding French artists to work on the Church at Plateau d'Assy in France for which he designed 5 windows.

In 1947 Rouault won a suit against the heirs of Ambroise Vollard for recovery of about 700 unfinished paintings. Because he saw no possibility of completing many of these, and because he did not want inferior, uncompleted work of this calibre to reach the market, he burned 315 of these before witnesses.

His more recent work, since 1948 - most of which reiterates his biblical themes - shows a radical change in his palette to strong golden hues intermingled with green and red.

Two years ago Rouault was honored by the French Government in an 80th birthday celebration and was made Commander of the Legion of Honor.

Prints:

Mr. Lieberman says of the prints:

> Rouault has been one of the most prolific printmakers of the 20th century. The present retrospective show features 90 of his prints in color and in black and white. In 1938 the Museum of Modern Art held the first comprehensive exhibition of his prints. Although Rouault's first etchings and lithographs are dated 1910, the great body of his graphic work belongs to the decade of the 1920s: the two series of etchings and aquatints, Les Réincarnations de Père Ubu and Miserere completed for Ambroise Vollard as well as many lithographs commissioned by other publishers.
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> Miserere, perhaps Rouault's most impressive single achievement in any medium, consists of 58 large plates completed between 1922 and 1927. A comprehensive selection from Miserere is augmented by several related prints never previously shown.
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> From four series of color etchings and aquatints done during the 1930s, the illustrations to Baudelaire's poems are exhibited for the first time in America. Also included are several large lithographs such as the monumental portrait of Paul Verlaine of 1933.

More than any other artist of today, the reputation of Georges Rouault rests as firmly upon his production as a printmaker as upon his achievement as a painter.

Film strips are being made on the Rouault exhibition, one in color, one in black and white, each composed of about 40 frames. These will be available for purchase from the Museum by August.

Edgar Wind, Professor of Art and Philosophy at Smith College, will give an illustrated talk on "Traditional Religion and Contemporary Art" on Wednesday, April 8, at 8:30 p.m. in the Museum Auditorium. This is one of "The Related Arts of Today" series of events sponsored by the Junior Council of the Museum. Admission is $1.50 for Museum members, $2.00 for non-members.

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