Sergei Mironenko - Goodbye, 1992
Acrylic on Canvas, 76" x 56 1/2"

Front Flap
Farid Bogdolov - Dominoes, 1992-93
Mixed Media on Board, 28 pieces 9" x 19" each

Cover
Valerii Koshliakov - Portrait of Hermes, 1992
Oil on Canvas, 67" x 57 1/2"
Devotion to art in its many forms has always been a Russian characteristic. If nothing else, we recognize the Bolshoi Ballet and the Hermitage Museum as two great institutions of fine art and civilization in the world. I was introduced to both while on my first journey in 1988, to what was then the Soviet Union.

I was accompanying a group of businessmen from Oklahoma under the auspices of the People To People Exchange Program. Even though Gorbachev was in power and change in Russia was underway, our group's goal of initiating business seemed virtually unachievable so I soon abandoned their planned activities in favor of exploring Moscow, St. Petersburg (still called Leningrad at the time) and one or two other Soviet cities on my own.

Andrei Karpov - Four Types of Memory, 1992
Oil on Canvas, 58" x 77"

I was finally able to visit a few of the country's great museums and see evidence of how, in the face of incredible adversity, art had been held in the highest regard by the Russians. What was once the Winter Palace of the Czars in St. Petersburg and had become little more than a shell after World War II, had been carefully restored to its original aristocratic state by the Communists. While I don't follow this logic, I can only assume what they didn't understand, they didn't destroy. Today of course, the Winter Palace is the home of the Hermitage Museum and houses one of the greatest fine art collections ever assembled. As such, it is

Inessa Topolskii
Dr. Thulp's Anatomy Lesson, 1991, Oil on Canvas, 16 pieces attached to metal sheet, 55" x 79 1/2"

SergeiSherstluk - The Letter, 1989
Acrylic on Canvas, 78" x 57 1/2"
Back home, I met with the then director of the Oklahoma City Art Museum, Christopher Youngs and developed a framework for collecting. It was decided that overtly political art could easily become dated given the rapidly changing political atmosphere and in the few examples I had seen, the subtle messages didn't translate easily for Western audiences.

Although a great many contemporary Russian artists deal with conceptual art, so much of it involves intricate installations and I personally find paintings more immediate. I was also interested in work by younger artists of my own generation who had chosen to remain in Russia. I felt they were more likely to respond to changes taking place in a post-glasnost society and could express, as no others before them, the exuberant feelings of newfound freedom in their art. Ultimately, the collection ended up including three generations as a result of another criteria, that a broad representation of style be considered.

Having established the parameters for the collection, I discussed the process of identifying artists with curator, Jon Burris and together we began research and talked to other collectors, dealers and critics. Catalogues from the relatively few auctions and international exhibitions that had been organized to this date, provided a basic list of names. In June of 1992, we made the first of what would become three extended trips to Moscow and St. Petersburg. In all,
we would meet with over 100 artists, arriving at a selection of 33 whose works would be included in this exhibition.

While much has been written about "official" and "unofficial" artists, the underground, nonconformists or members of the new vanguard, the artists themselves already seem beyond such identities and lines once drawn between intellectual, political and social camps have blurred. A distinctively competitive mood has replaced one of paranoia as, for the first time, they have been faced with the prospect of integrating themselves into a global community and marketplace.

Without the fear of reprisals and given the ability to communicate freely with an audience, it has become for them, a wonderful time of experimentation with both ideas and styles. They also draw upon their rich cultural heritage and appreciation of all the arts while exhibiting a clear understanding of international trends and movements of the past decade. While the majority of these paintings are figurative, the influence of Constructivism, Neoexpressionism, Primitive Expressionism, Hyperrealism,

Pop, Conceptual and abstract art is to be found throughout the work. Irony, lyricism and fantasy are recurring motifs and there is a hint of subversive humor that runs through much of the art.

As I write this, I realize that day to day life in Russia seems to be in an everchanging state of chaos and one might wonder about the future of this generation of artists. I remain however, hopeful, believing their characteristic spirit will endure and that I may return again and again to witness the development of the new Russian art.

Assembling an exhibition such as this requires the expertise of many people. I would like to express my sincere thanks to Jon Burris for his unending commitment to this project. Without his understanding and guidance, there would be no art here. His skills as curator, project coordinator and documentary photographer have been integral to our success. I would also like to extend thanks to Tania and Natasha Kolodzei, for introducing us to so many artists in both Moscow and St. Petersburg, to Christopher Youngs for his early encouragement, to Vladimir Bodrov, our Russian driver, bodyguard and friend, and finally, to my Grandmother, Eleanor Blake Kirkpatrick for instilling in me a love for art when I was quite young and for her support and encouragement of this project since its inception.

Christian Keesee
Armen Savadov & Georgii Senchenko
Paradise Lost, 1991
Silkscreen on Canvas with attached ropes, 145" x 110"

Natalia Nesterova - Tightrope, 1992
Oil on Canvas, 62" x 54"

Roland Shalamberidze - Untitled, 1992
Oil on Canvas, 56" x 62 1/2"