A rare opportunity to view works of art by members of Russia’s new global artistic community awaits those who visit an exhibition premiering Sept. 25 at the University of Oklahoma Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art.

The nationally circulating exhibition, which will premier at OU, showcases the works of 33 contemporary Russian painters who have chosen to remain in their homeland and take advantage of a new-found artistic freedom, unfettered by governmental censure. The exhibition will run through Nov. 6.

“New Russian Art: Paintings From the Christian Keesee Collection” opens to the public with a free reception from 2 to 4 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 25.

Artists in the former Soviet Union currently are experiencing unprecedented freedom in all aspects of life. While under communist rule, art not adhering to the stylistic and political tenets of social realism was prohibited and could bring severe reprimands to the artist. Now artists are taking advantage of more freedom of travel and of the books, magazines and other media flowing in and out of Russia.

“Assembled over the past three years in a time of glasnost, the contemporary Russian paintings in the Christian Keesee Collection represent a body of work unlike any that has come before it,” project coordinator Jon Burris said. The new openness in Russia also has led to an energetic experimentation with style and form as the artists “find their voices” in a post-communist society, he said.

“These are not works by émigré underground artists challenging their totalitarian system with pop pictures of hammers and sickles and portraits of Lenin,” Burris said. “American audiences will indeed be surprised to find the degree of spirit and intelligence expressed in the ideas of the new vanguard of Russian painters, who have chosen to remain in their country and respond to their unique moment of freedom.”

The majority of the paintings are figurative, although the influences of abstract art, hyperrealism, neo-expressionism and primitive expressionism are all evident. The artists in the collection of 45 paintings embrace, reinterpret and reject their cultural legacy in the forms of constructivism, surrealism, modernism, post-modernism, sots (a Russian version of pop), social realism and conceptualism. In addition to these influences, irony, lyricism and fantasy are motifs that recur throughout the exhibition.

“Forget the proverbial 15 minutes of fame,” Burris said. “This generation of artists will represent the new Russian art for a long time to come.”

“New Russian Art: Paintings From the Christian Keesee Collection” is organized by the Christian Keesee Collection, Project for Contemporary Russian Art. The exhibition is also curated by Jon Burris and circulated by Curatorial Assistance Inc., Los Angeles.

Christian Keesee is an Oklahoma businessman and collector who is involved primarily in banking and finance. He is chairman of American Bancorp Inc., Edmond. As vice chairman of the Kirkpatrick Foundation, based in Oklahoma City, he works closely with his family in distributing funding to many Oklahoma-based charities and organizations.

The exhibition makes its debut at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art before beginning a national tour that will run through December 1997. The exhibition will be accompanied by a color catalog, poster and hourlong video of interviews with the artists.

The OU Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, 410 W. Boyd St., is open from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays; 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Thursdays; and 1 to 4:30 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. On home football game Saturdays, the museum is open from 10 a.m. until kickoff.

Admission is free, and free parking passes for use in reserved spaces on the Parrington (north) Oval may be obtained at the museum’s security desk. For more information on tours, educational programming and special events, call (405) 325-3272.