**The Organic School**

The Organic School of the Russian avant-garde was a group of artists, mainly based in St. Petersburg, who were less concerned with the urban, ideological, and utilitarian aspects of modernist art and focused instead on holistic approaches to art and life; it includes Elena Guro, Nikolai Kulbin, Mikhail Matiushin and his students, Pavel Filonov and his followers, as well as Pavel Mansurov, Petr Miturich, and Vladimir Tatlin. The artists of the Organic School saw in the unlimited potential of nature a model and never-ending source for artistic creation. They viewed artistic activity not as passive imitation of nature, but as an active expression of the relationship between the artist and the natural environment and called for a new, absolute art, one that did not copy nature, but was based on its universal laws and organic principles. Taking as their model the developmental processes, natural forces, and organic forms found in nature, their aesthetics was informed by pantheist, neo-vitalist, and monist ideas as well as by evolutionary thought and scientific knowledge from the fields of physics, biology, physiology, and psychology. Discussing the materials and processes involved in the creation of art and analyzing the elementary building blocks of painting, these artists not only explored the properties of color and form and their psychophysiological effects upon the viewer, but also focused on *faktura* (literally “texture,”), which they considered to be a fundamental principle of the creative process. Emphasizing human creativity and the psychological dimension of art, the artists of the Organic School of the Russian avant-garde viewed art as a means toward individual self-realization, leading to the unification of art and life, body and soul, humanity and nature.

The discussion of Matiushin’s Organic Culture, Filonov’s Analytical Art, and Miturich’s and Tatlin’s Organic Constructivism as another aspect of Russian avant-garde art, which does not fit into the Cubist-Constructivist tradition, was first explored by art historians such as Charlotte Douglas, Evgeni Kovtun, Christina Lodder, and Alla Povelikhina in the 1980s. The works and writings of the Organic School are held in the following institutions and collections: the State Museum of the History of St. Petersburg, the State Russian Museum, the State Institute of Russian Literature at the Pushkin House, and the former Leningrad State Archive of Literature and Art in St. Petersburg; the State Tretiakov Gallery, the State Mayakovsky Museum, and the Russian State Archives of Literature and Art in Moscow; the George Costakis Collection in Thessaloniki, the Khardziev-Chaga Collection at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Collection Ludwig at the Museum Ludwig in Cologne, and other public and private institutions. With the reconstruction of the former residence of Guro and Matiushin and the opening of the Museum of the St. Petersburg Avant-Garde there in 2005, the Organic School of the Russian avant-garde has found a new home.

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Fig.: Mikhail Matiushin with his root sculptures in front of Pavel Filonov’s analytical paintings in the First Free State Art Exhibition at the Winter Palace in Petrograd, 1919, photograph