The formal establishment of the Russian Academy of Artistic Sciences (RAKhN) in Moscow was on October 13, 1921, with Petr Kogan as President, Vasilii Kandinsky as Vice-President, and Akim Kondrat'ev as Academic Secretary [Ills. 16-19]. However, before that date a nucleus of future RAKhN members – rakhnovtsy – had been active within the planning committee, i.e., the so-called Scientific-Artistic Commission under the auspices of Narkompros, and the titles “RAKhN” and “Academy” were used for several months before October 1921; in May 1925 RAKhN was renamed GAKhN (State Academy of Artistic Sciences). The mandate and goal of RAKhN was to examine the relationship between the creative arts and the positive sciences and to elaborate a rational theory of art history. With its interdisciplinary approach, broad tolerance of conflicting points of view, numerous sections and subsections, and ambitious lecture and publication programs, RAKhN represented a last stand in defense of the autonomy of culture and of cultural diversity within a society that was becoming increasingly monolithic and homogeneous. During the more felicitous period of 1921-24, for example, RAKhN organized no less than 99 exhibitions at home and abroad, 1,087 lectures, and “1,481 academic sessions,”2 covering the most diverse disciplines – the theory of art, music, and the theater, the psychology of perception, and psychoanalysis.

RAKhN brought together the crème of a cosmopolitan intelligentsia representing the most varied professions – painters and architects such as Konstantin Iuon and Ivan Zholtovsky, art historians such as Anatolii Bakushinsky, Nikolai Mashkovtsev, and Aleksei Sidorov, architectural historians such as Evsei Shor, physcists such as Petr Lazarev and Nikolai Uspensky, philosophers such as Nikolai Berdiaev, Pavel Florensky, and Gustav Shpet, literary historians such as Mikhail Gerzhenzon, musicians and musicologists such as Nadezhda Briusova, Leonid Sabaneev, and Aleksandr Shenshin, psycholo-

1. This essay consists of extracts modified and taken from the longer article, “A Citadel of Idealism: RAKhN as a Soviet Anomaly,” Experiment, 3 (1997), 14-30.
gists such as Georgii Chelpanov, biologists such as Pavel Kapterev, and sociologists such as Aleksandr Bogdanov and Vladimir Friche. The gracious RAKhN building at 32, Kropotkinskaia soon became too small to accommodate the numerous activities (from gala concerts and performances of contemporary dance to psychological experiments) and space remained a vexed question throughout the 1920s.

By its very nature RAKhN was, of course, an "academy" with a strong observance of traditional scholarship – the kind of "think tank" for advanced research that Kandinsky had contemplated since well before the October Revolution. Here was a venerable institution that, apart from Kandinsky, had little to do with the artists of the avant-garde and its attitude towards them was, to say the least, ambivalent, even though Kazimir Malevich delivered two lectures to the Physico-Psychological Department in 1924. While RAKhN counted theoreticians such as Boris Arvatov, Nikolai Tarabukin, and other Constructivist sympathizers among its members, it gave preference to the more conservative trends represented by figurative artists such as Robert Fal'k, Vladimir Favorsky, Pavel Kuznetsov, and Iuon. On the other hand, the rakhnovtsy did not see any real contradiction, for they regarded the experimental aspect of their researchers to be of overriding importance: "An 'experiment' in the field of art history might seem to be a paradox. But this or that potential divergence in analogous artistic forms, changes in conditions of perception, the state of the external environment in which a work of art is placed – all this allows us to speak of an experimental art history, not just of an empirical one."

The most important of the initial divisions within RAKhN was the Physico-Psychological Department founded by Kandinsky after his resignation from Inkhuk at the beginning of 1921 (the other two main divisions being the Philosophical Department headed by Shpet and the Sociological Department headed by Friche) which began to function even before the official inauguration of RAKhN. Like Vkhutemas and other early Soviet organizations, the structure of RAKhN was flexible and constantly "in progress," forming a constellation of "commissions" for the study of the most diverse subjects, several "cabinets" or studios specializing in photography, terminology, and so on, and at least two laboratories dedicated to choreology and psycho-physics. The Physico-Psychological Department alone spawned no less than eight commissions whose functions often intersected and overlapped with analogous commissions within the Philosophical and Sociological Departments – such as the