



Marcel Storr, *Untitled*, ca. 1968, graphite, colored ink, and varnish on paper, 20 × 24".

## Marcel Storr

ANDREW EDLIN GALLERY

One can imagine self-taught artist Marcel Storr (1911–1976) in 1964, his head bent low over the Paris streets he was employed to sweep, as he studied the staggered patterns of the cobblestones. Back at his home in the ninth arrondissement, not far from the ornate Église de la Sainte-Trinité and the historic Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, he would dream up his own extraordinary ecclesiastical sites through a series of graphite and colored-ink drawings, roughly sixty-four in total, that he produced over the course of his lifetime. Though the significant gap in information about Storr's life prohibits a clear understanding of his relationship to religion, his output indicates that he was searching for some kind of understanding, and perhaps to have a hand in divine creation.

In pictures dating back to the 1930s, Storr fashioned turrets and spires that complemented gothic archways framing dark voids, enhanced by the mauves and salmons of dusky, majestic skies. The grounds of his creations were landscaped with bulky bushes and trees, but the scale was always thrown off by the people he put in them—like trails of ants, perhaps added as an afterthought. Through experiments with perspective; extravagant architectural flourishes; and meticulous repetitions of stone blocks, spires, roofing tiles, and eaves, he made his formidable structures appear even more inviolable. He showed his designs to no one but his wife, and he didn't seem to care about the practical matters of building his structures (which perhaps only Edward Gorey's motley crew would have occupied). The drawings were about the facades, their evocations of awe, and the anticipation of finding oneself standing before something all-encompassing.

Although it is unlikely that Storr was involved in the Paris protests of May 1968, his work seems to have shifted around that time—his religious architectures became increasingly hallucinatory, his scale larger, and his palette more extreme. In one work, *Untitled*, ca. 1968, bulbous stacks of minaret-like towers are colored in highlighter tones of pinks on top of yellows on top of greens.

This exhibition outlined Storr's progression across sixteen works on paper—a quarter of his estimated oeuvre. Few of the works had titles, save for the undated, body-size *Diptyche* and two large, unfinished, also undated pieces, each one a draft of a detail of a polyptych that was likely never completed. The sketches reveal the first stages of the artist's process: An intricate pencil drawing is followed by a wash of color over the framework of his buildings, followed by a layer of black ink tracing the graphite underdrawing, on top of which additional colored inks and minutiae are applied. His plans for vast cities, often dwarfed by a single monumental structure, are largely symmetrical, evoking the aura of a monarch's vision for his domain. Indeed, who could build these cities without first leveling one, and who could inhabit a place devoid of domiciles, bursting with ever-taller aspirations toward the sky? While *Diptyche* includes hordes of people having arrived in propeller cars and double-decker buses to stand on the vertiginous balconies of a cathedral, the vibrant megalopolises are crossed by superhighways, labyrinthine pathways, and lagoons dotted with dragon boats, all cowering under tessellated Eiffel Towers and pagodas. No longer do these imply that Storr is looking up at Notre-Dame-de-Lorette from the avenue—the grandeur has been tainted by the sinister. Far from New Babylon, these Escheresque urban spaces evoke not deities but dictators, protected by watchtowers and Brutalist fortresses.