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Topics: Andrew Edlin, Marcel Storr, outsider art

For an artist obsessed with cathedrals, **Marcel Storr** sure had his eyes on the ground. He had to, for he settled into a job as a street sweeper in Boulogne, and he never once left the city. Besides, had he looked up, his visionary architecture would be gone.

Had Storr looked up, too, he would have had to turn away from adding floor after floor and detail after detail to his drawings, at **Andrew Edlin** through December 8. They never add up to a recognizable city or historical style, which is only his due. He may have loved them all the more for existing solely in his mind. He died in 1976 without an exhibition in his lifetime, assuming he ever sought one. No one knows to this day how he stumbled on his visions. His earliest work, from the 1930s, sticks to more modest structures, although not the ones he knew. No works survive from another two decades.

Coincidence or not, his imagination may have taken flight in middle age, in 1964, the same year that he took the



job on the streets. Maybe he felt the need to escape its garbage and mundanity. Maybe, too, it taught him to worry over detail. Like **Frank Lloyd Wright**, he dreamed of grandiose **unbuilt projects**. (No, Wright did not complete his either.) Still, he recognized that even a mile-high city has to take things one awkward story at a time.

Storr conforms well enough to the **outsider artist**, in a gallery devoted to the like. He kept to a backwater compared to Paris, he had no skill in perspective or foreshortening, and he comes off as more than a little mad. Still, he was a visionary in a century of visionaries, with a pad of artist's paper, and he bases at least one sketch on Rockefeller Center in New York. He had no interest in crossing over to architecture as a discipline, but then he came of age during Surrealism, with its **dominion of the dream**. His overwrought clouds, in art with hardly a single clear sky, have a touch of **René Magritte**. They also run to rust or blood red, from an artist equally fascinated with observation and what he could not see.

The show, with close to half of his sixty or so surviving works in graphite and colored ink, outlines four stages. Early structures already include churches, well before they rise to a ridiculous scale. After street views, he tries higher vantage points, both unnatural and both designed to magnify the towers. They sprawl across outsize city blocks as well as vertically, and a fourth group could pass for urban planning. For all their plazas, though, they have precious room for air. The many indications of pedestrians, like those of beards, are preposterously small.

Boulogne does have a noted cathedral, but Storr seems uninterested in its commanding dome. He draws on many historical styles, mostly medieval and both Eastern and European, but he leans most to the spindly windows and towers of Gothic architecture—and with nothing so airy and stable as a flying buttress. And those peaks multiply out of control, too. He has something in common as well with the elaborate model cities of **Bodys Isek Kingelez** in Africa, but Kingelez constructed his from supermarket packaging, like Pop Art. Storr lives in a more distant and invented past. Like the skies, it also glows from within in unseemly yellow and red. He could well have had a horror of the present.

The show emphasizes the horror in its title, “Mysterium Tremendum” (with roots in *terror* as well as *tremendous*), after a critic, Donald Kuspit. Still, few will leave in fear. Like much outsider art, it seems more humorous, intentionally or not. Few, too, will agonize over details, by counting stories or

the number of spikes or crosses emanating from any one tower. Even when buildings lean unsteadily, which is often, as in amateur photographs of skyscrapers, they seem in no danger of falling on those tiny specks on their steps—or on you. Storr would have shared in the elation.