

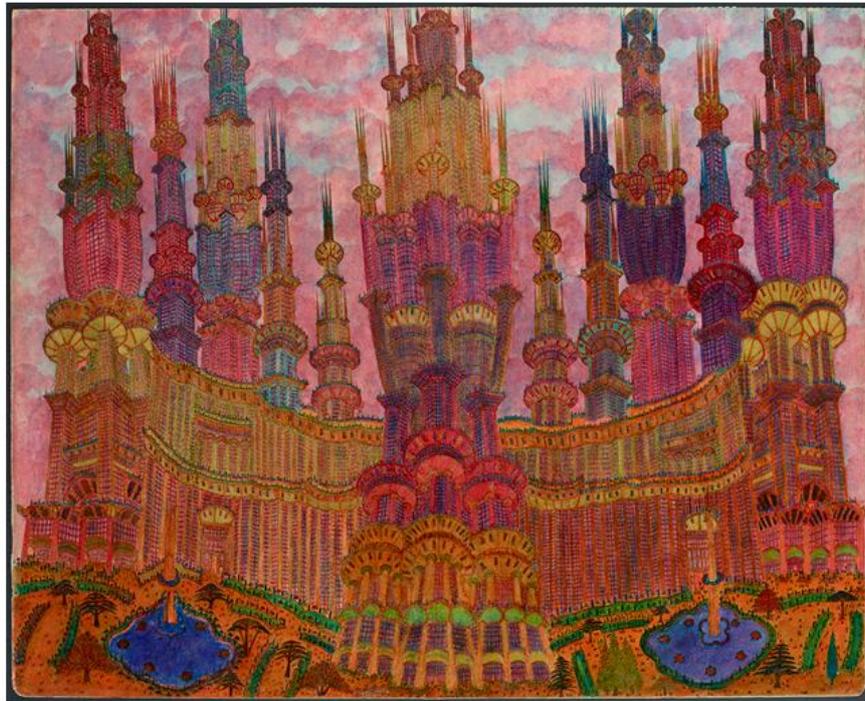
HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

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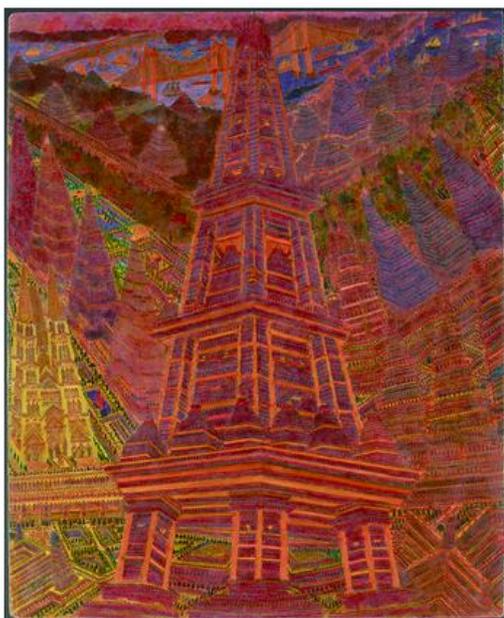
Psychedelic Plans for a Post-Apocalyptic Paris

by Allison Meier on June 25, 2013



Marcel Storr, "Untitled" (Courtesy Liliane and Bertrand Kempf)

Out of apocalyptic ruin, a Parisian street-sweeper imagined his city rising again with staggering spires grasping up to the skies. These artistic "blueprints" by Marcel Storr were long secreted away, but recent exhibitions have brought this restless new world into the public eye.



Marcel Storr, "Untitled" (undated) (Courtesy Liliane and Bertrand Kempf) ([click here for full resolution](#))

Alternative Guide to the Universe at the Hayward Gallery in London is a group show drawing together visionary and self-taught artists along with "architects, fringe physicists, dreamers, and visionary engineers." Storr is one of these highlighted re-inventors of the world, with his speculative buildings having a intricate beauty to them, even out of the context of their grand vision.

Storr had a rough life, abandoned as a child and mistreated before having a series of small jobs that brought him to sweeping leaves at the Bois de Boulogne park in Paris. Why he was so afraid of an atomic attack on Paris is unclear, except perhaps a life of downtrodden anxiety, but in over 50 drawings painstakingly created over many years he drew up plans for rebuilding the City of Lights post-nuclear attack. They were all a secret until his wife invited a couple, Liliane and Bertrand Kempf, over to see the work in 1971. He refused to sell, yet when he passed away in 1976 his work was guarded as a single body. Although slow to get exposure, the attention has been snowballing since it was first exhibited in 2001 at the Halle Saint-Pierre

in Paris, with a whole exhibition of the oeuvre in 2011-12 at the Pavillon Carré du Baudouin. A documentary was made on his work, and it's also currently in Vues d'en haut at the Centre Pompidou-Metz.



Installation view of works by Marcel Storr in "Alternative Guide to the Universe" at the Hayward Gallery. (Photograph by Linda Nylind, Courtesy Southbank Centre)

The new city is all spires with echoes of the Eiffel Tower, Notre-Dame de Paris, and Sacre Coeur all mingled in this celebration of the monolithic majesty of cathedrals. And just as those gothic cathedrals were meant to instill in their visitors a sense of breathtaking awe in the great unknown and God, there is something ominous about the drawings with their massive towers. Like Angkor Wat rambling through the mind of Antoni Gaudí, the spires multiply in a limitless metropolis, dwarfing the tiny trees and scarce vehicles that survive in their shadows. It's a disorienting, somewhat terrifying future, where the perspectives are at uncanny angles and the shades of yellow and hues of pink project light against a subdued sky. It's a hallucinatory place, but one which Storr thought would be a beautiful world after this one was brutally destroyed.



Marcel Storr, "Untitled" (1973) (Courtesy Liliane and Bertrand Kempf)

Alternative Guide to the Universe continues through August 26 at the Hayward Gallery at Southbank Centre (Belvedere Road, London).