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# The New York Times

## Art in Review

By Karen Rosenberg

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*Landscapes! Romance, Recession and Rottenness* at Taxter & Spengemann  
*Drawings of Harlem* at The Studio Museum in Harlem

The talented Wardell Milan returns to the scenes of his breakouts in two concurrent shows, at the gallery Taxter & Spengemann and the Studio Museum in Harlem. Back then, around 2006, gloriously decadent dioramas were his thing. A few years have passed, and Mr. Milan is now making more focused, but not as exciting, drawings and collages.

At Taxter & Spengemann he alternates prim Victoriana with saltier imagery. The results are unpredictable, varying widely in sophistication and subtlety.

In a series called "The Holy Ghost," Mr. Milan collages over fashion advertisements featuring the supermodel Naomi Campbell. He adorns Ms. Campbell with roses, fur and feathers, but leaves visible large swaths of the original photographs (by Inez Van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin for YSL). The result has more of the fashion shoot's artistry than Mr. Milan's.

In "The Holy Ghost" his interventions are too tentative; in a group of small works combining found landscape photographs with porn clippings, they're ham-fisted. Elsewhere he puts the same material to more evocative use, grafting petal-like cutouts from skin magazines onto antique botanical prints. The flowers make up one bouquet, the different flesh tones another.

More subversive horticulture is at work in Mr. Milan's large drawings of decaying tulips. They're symbols of the market -- the series is titled "Tulipomania," after the Dutch craze, but they also have a creepy, sepulchral presence.

Mr. Milan's 51 drawings of Harlem, at the Studio Museum, evolved from a couple of sketches for a museum publication. His barbershops, churches and bodegas, done in a halting hand, don't tell you much more about the area than Google's Street View. His figures, however, are inspired: a girl with a hula hoop, a man with a red afro and purple T-shirt, and several New Year's revelers in glasses that say 2009. All of it leaves you convinced that, for Mr. Milan, the best is yet to come.