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# ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS - SAN FRANCISCO | FEBRUARY 2019



Wardell Milan, *Bill T. Jones*, 2018, printed paper, 8 1/2 x 11".

## Wardell Milan

### FRAENKEL GALLERY

49 Geary Street 4th Floor  
January 3–February 16

Composite bodies constructed from pages of Robert Mapplethorpe's notorious *Black Book*, 1986, populate Wardell Milan's collages, drawings, and paintings. These fractured compositions of physical sensuality and social tension often include shards of images from other sources as well as renderings of lines and shapes glued onto the surface.

While the show is titled "Parisian Landscapes: Blue in Green," the first large work one sees has a deep red background and is inhabited by distorted, Frankenstein-like figures that could have been drawn from the paintings of Francis Bacon: Muscular men in posing straps and

things surround an overweight, nearly naked figure who stands tall in lacy knee socks and high heels—a room full of go-go boys.

Paul Gauguin's spirit hovers here, too, especially over a few beachy landscapes where collaged images of nude black men cavort across photographic backgrounds of sand and tropical foliage. One is titled *Two warriors looking for euphoria* and another is *A Zulu Love*, both 2018.

Mapplethorpe is explicitly invoked in these scenarios; numerous small works are titled after models in his book—perhaps the most recognizable is Bill T. Jones. These figures seem less overtly sexualized than playfully problematized: The cuts are intricate and the reattachments of body parts cubist, suggesting multiple perspectives. Milan's strength as an artist is in wresting references to problematic sources into scenes where beauty is difficult to reconcile with discomfort.

— Glen Helfand