

MEATPACKING DISTRICT

Cécile B. Evans

Through Jan. 5. The High Line, at 14th Street, Manhattan. thehighline.org/art.



Cécile B. Evans's "A Screen Test for an Adaptation of Giselle," 2019 (still). Cécile B. Evans

The American-born, London-based artist Cécile B. Evans is an incisive analyst of contemporary disturbances: artificial intelligence, networked knowledge, transformed ecosystems. Yet the roots of Evans's new work stretch back almost two centuries to "Giselle," Adolphe Adam's ballet of love, betrayal and redemption. At that ballet's center is the "Dance of the Wilis," a showstopper of ghostly maidens who died before their wedding night. In Evans's short film "A Screen Test for an Adaptation of Giselle" — showing daily on the High Line — the Wilis are very much alive, and dancing around more stubborn troubles.

This Giselle has fled to the countryside, following, her mother tells us in voice-over, "the great migration of people who moved from the ruins of this planet." Friends follow, then friends of friends, all dancing with a passionate aggression shot in tight close-ups, intercut with footage of riots and arson. In the forest, the red-draped Wilis form a spastic collective; their faces fluctuate through A.I.-generated variations, not pinned down to one identity or name. These climate-refugee maenads have reimagined society as — here's Giselle's mother again — "a constant stream of transfers."

Evans is an artist to take seriously, though it's a shame the projection conditions here are so hostile. The High Line only tells visitors that screenings take place "at dusk"; I Googled the sundown time, then stood in the cold for 45 minutes waiting for an 8-minute film, still poorly visible thanks to ambient light. I've waited two years to rediscover the ecosystem of the city; this was one time I'd have preferred my screen. *JASON FARAGO*