

Pilgrims

Yuyan Wang

9 October – 14 November 2026

*Doubt thou the stars are fire,
Doubt that the sun doth move,
Doubt truth to be a liar,
But never doubt I love.*

*...Thine evermore, most dear lady, whilst
this machine is to him, Hamlet.*

– William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 2, Scene 2

To feel in solidarity with him ... it is not necessary for me to grasp him.

– Édouard Glissant, "For Opacity," in *Poetics of Relation*

Emalin is pleased to present *Pilgrims*, Yuyan Wang's (b. 1989, Qingdao, China) first exhibition with the gallery and her first solo presentation in the United Kingdom. Spanning the Clerk's House and the nearby crypt of Shoreditch Church, the exhibition brings three bodies of work into relation across video and installation.

The exhibition's title, *Pilgrims*, foregrounds the condition of being compelled towards something that promises transformation. Across the exhibition, Wang traces this compulsion through the circulation of images and the movement of living and mechanical bodies. In her editing, she follows repetitions and affinities, allowing one image to draw another into its orbit. The particular force of her practice lies in holding critique and attachment together. She keeps the images' seductive pull active while attending to the systems through which they circulate. Repeated and repositioned, fragments made to instruct or promote acquire an affective density beyond their original function. Montage becomes an act of orientation in its own right, carrying movement from one image into the next until disparate fragments begin to compose a world. It is an act of devotion, too: in the quality of attention it gives to images' capacity to move us, we are invited to ask what is it that these images show or conceal; how is it that they organise longing.

At the Clerk's House, this movement through images traces an ecology of digital light. *Look On the Bright Side* (2023) imagines a world in which darkness has been overpowered. It follows digital brightness back to the minerals, factories, electrical grids and bodies that sustain it, undoing the capitalist myth that new technologies are immaterial.

The film takes as its point of departure a proposal, made in China in 2018, to launch artificial moons into orbit above cities to provide continuous daylight. Promoted as a means of reducing street-lighting costs, the proposal recast darkness as a

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technical problem to be managed. In the film, a society held within homogeneous brightness must remain active and available; darkness, therefore, with its possibilities for withdrawal and mystery, comes to represent an intolerable inefficiency. The film draws on Édouard Glissant's *droit à l'opacité*, the right to opacity, which refuses the demand that a person become wholly knowable according to another's terms. Against the transparency that networked technology promises, the body remains opaque. It tires and requires rest. These limits, which the film declines to treat as failings, are a form of resistance to the capitalist and neocolonial demand for ceaseless productivity and visibility; holding open a space that no quantity of light can entirely reach.

Moths and other winged insects appear briefly among the film's images. In *Mourning Sun* (2024-2026), their shadows recur throughout the building, they appear trapped in the illuminated spaces behind them. Natural light gives nocturnal insects their bearings, while a nearby artificial source disrupts that relation, holding them in orbit around a false sun. Their disorientation returns us to the community of *Look On the Bright Side*, and to our own attachment to visibility and connection, organised around the impossible promise that we might be able to perceive everything from everywhere.

A short walk from the Clerk's House, *Boring Billion* (2026) is shown in the crypt of Shoreditch Church. Composed entirely from footage found online, the film descends into an underground world of ageing industrial infrastructure. Footage from maintenance tutorials follows unseen workers as they inspect damaged pipes and lubricate interlocking gears. Wang's edit moves closely across surfaces and viscous residues, giving the machinery a visceral register, before turning to engineers assisting humanoid machines as they learn to walk, grasp and find their balance. Obsolete technologies appear as relics of earlier futures, while progress assumes the rhythm of maintenance and rehearsal. Across these images, infrastructure, machines and living bodies depend on repeated acts of care to remain in motion. Wang elicits empathy through movement as much as anthropomorphic resemblance. Her edits fall into step with these bodies, making us feel the gravity in our own bodies, too, as we watch. The film's humanoid machines give technological form to mimetic desire, proposing another kind of body made in our image through which something of us might continue.

This fantasy acquires another resonance at Shoreditch Church, known as the Actors' Church, and as the burial place of several figures associated with the Shakespearean stage. Among them was Richard Burbage, the first actor to play Hamlet. "Thine evermore ... whilst this machine is to him," Hamlet writes to Ophelia — a declaration of love made from within the mortal apparatus of the body. The words sound different here, at the church where Burbage was laid to rest and where Wang's machines appear to stumble into feeling. The film's distorted refrain from DeBarge's R&B song *All This Love* brings a second declaration of love into the crypt. Set against these acts of mechanical learning, its invitation to "learn the ways of love" makes technical instruction sound like an education in intimacy. Together, Shakespeare's letter and DeBarge's song ask how love, experienced as limitless, can be contained by a vulnerable body. Surrounded by the material fact of death, the machine's resemblance to us acquires the pathos of a substitute body — one made to repeat our movements and bear a fantasy of life.

Emalin would like to thank Shoreditch Church and SAINT for their generous support in making the presentation of *Boring Billion* in the crypt possible.

Yuyan Wang (b. 1989, Qingdao, China) lives and works in Paris, FR. Wang graduated from the École des Beaux-Arts de Paris in 2016 and from Le Fresnoy – Studio national des arts contemporains in 2022. Her films have been presented at festivals including Berlinale International Film Festival, International Film Festival Rotterdam, MoMA Doc Fortnight and CPH:DOX.

Recent solo exhibitions have been held at Forde, Geneva (2026); CRAC Alsace, Altkirch (2026); 3 bis f – Centre d'arts contemporains, Aix-en-Provence (2025); The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin (2025); and Wanås Konst, Knislinge (2025). Her work has been included in group exhibitions and screenings at Amant, New York (2026); Contour Biennale for Moving Image, Mechelen (2026); The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto (2026); Biennale Gherdëina (2026); Fondazione In Between Art Film, Complesso dell'Ospedaletto, Venice (2026); North Rhine-Westphalian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Düsseldorf (2026); Bourse de Commerce, Paris (2026); Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, Cambridge (2026); MACRO Museum, Rome (2026); Singapore Biennale (2025); Museum of the Moving Image, New York (2025); Barbican Centre, London (2024); Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk (2024); 15th Gwangju Biennale, Gwangju (2024); UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (2024); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2023); ICA, London (2023); CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux (2023); Fondation Fiminco, Paris (2023); Tate Modern, London (2022); Biennale des imaginaires numériques, Marseille (2022); and the 12th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art (2022).

LIST OF WORKS

The Clerk's House

Mourning Sun, 2024-2026

video installation, garden fleece, colour, silent

duration: 2' loop

Look On the Bright Side, 2023

HD video, colour, sound

duration: 15'50" loop

Shoreditch Church Crypt

Boring Billion, 2026

HD video, colour, sound

duration: 14'50"

