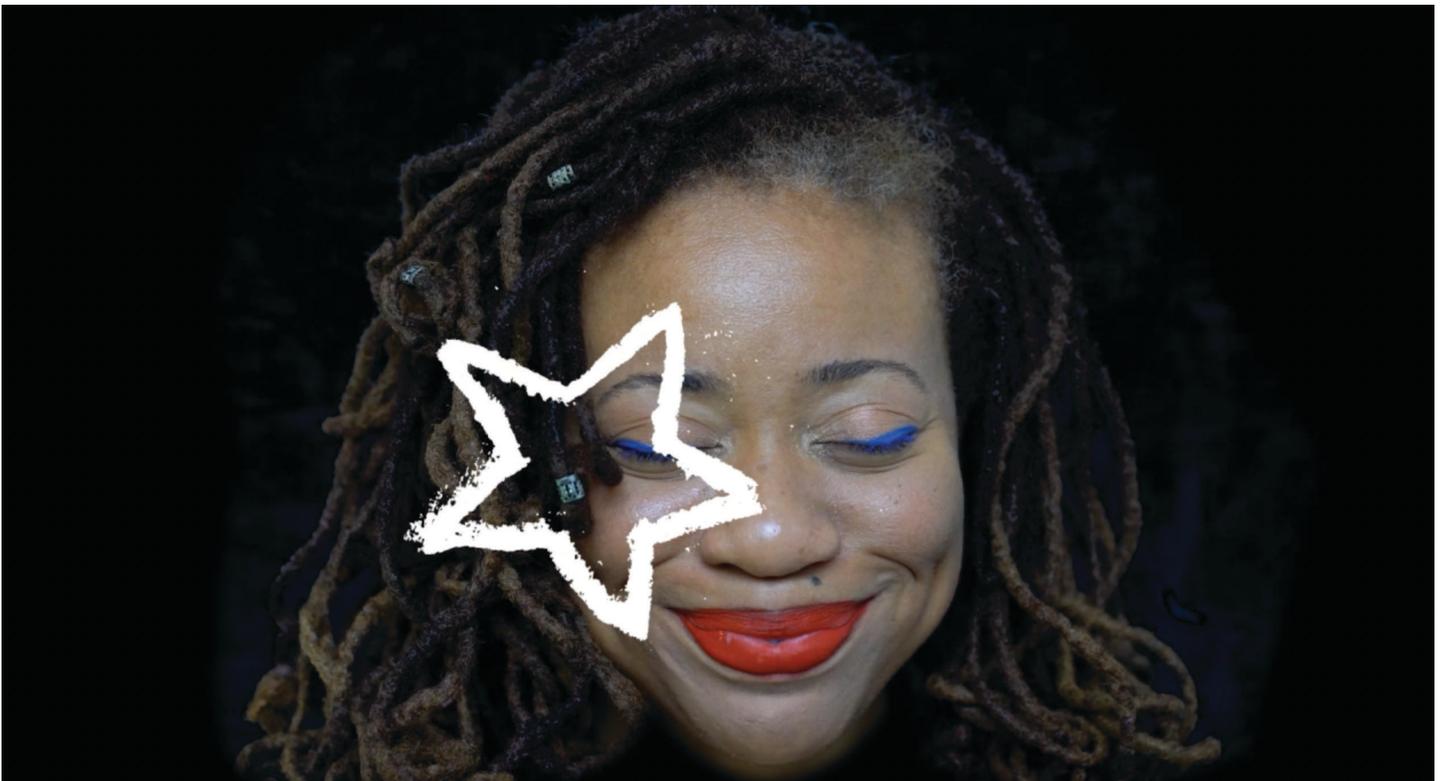


Ayana Evans

Teaser



Ayana Evans, *You gotta watch this sh*t* (video still), 2018. Filmed in collaboration with and edited by Carl Klooney. Courtesy the artist.

Ayana Evans: Teaser features a recent work by the artist, *You gotta watch this sh*t*, (2018). Presented as part of our Street Views series, this video installation transforms the Museum's facade into a public gallery every evening from dusk to midnight.

In the video, New York-based performance artist Ayana Evans mugs for the camera. She makes faces that cycle through a variety of emotional registers, from happy and pouty, to surprised and annoyed. She dons a plastic tiara bearing the word PRINCESS, and plays with a brightly-colored wig sporting a unicorn horn. In other scenes, she's clothed in a neon green, zebra-striped catsuit in front of a similarly patterned backdrop—an anti-camouflage that has become a signature look. Her video is, by turns, funny, seductive, confrontational, and zany. Evans's early studies in painting inform her use of

bright color and painterly gesture. But as she began to explore performance and live arts, she found her voice. Temporality, ephemerality, and opportunities for audience participation animate her practice.

If all of this seems light-hearted, it's decidedly not, or not only. Evans digs into pressing subjects like sexism, racism, and the apparent exclusivity of the art world—using her work to ask questions and render answers. In *You gotta watch this sh*t*, Evans delves into dissonances between character and self, or what is perceived on the surface and what lies beneath. We might ask who the woman is in this video: the artist, or an invented character? She could be both. By challenging the notion that a singular, stable, authentic self exists, Evans claims space for multiplicity, complexity, self-determination, and self-confidence.

Donning clothing that makes her hyper-visible was, initially, a way for Evans to test her own self-confidence. In an early guerilla performance work, she made up her face and hair, put on a pair of bright red high heels and a neon green zebra-striped catsuit (she's owned a few of these over the years), and made her way into public spaces that included art galleries, supermarkets, and museums. By her own account, she was "doing the most," though she was also staying true to her authentic self. Facing personal vulnerability helped her to realize how many people projected varying assumptions onto her based on her appearance. For Black women like Evans, this can be particularly fraught territory, though she has, in her typical fashion, used it towards generous ends. Her work is often therapeutic, and through it, Evans rejects and exposes limitations and the oppressive societal structures that reinforce them. She advocates instead for empathy, humanity, and lived connection.

While the title of this presentation suggests the emotional playfulness Evans exhibits in *You gotta watch this sh*t*, it also has a double meaning: *Teaser* anticipates the comprehensive exhibition of Evans's work entitled *Nobody's Gonna Love You the Way I Do* that will be on view at CAM from September 10, 2026–February 7, 2027. As the first survey exhibition of the artist's work, *Nobody's Gonna Love You the Way I Do* will mix video, archival materials, objects, performances, and live arts to explore how Evans advocates for a better world, while putting herself on the line.

Ayana Evans: Teaser is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Dean Daderko, Ferring Foundation Chief Curator, with support from Grace Early, Exhibitions Assistant.

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Performance portrait in Maine. Photo: Dominique Duroseau and Nyugen Smith.

Ayana Evans (b. Chicago, IL) is a NYC-based performance artist whose guerilla-style work has been staged at El Museo del Barrio, The Barnes Foundation, The Bronx Museum, Crystal Bridges Museum, Newark Museum, Queens Museum, and various public spaces. Her performances have been reviewed in *The New York Times*, *Bomb Magazine*, *ArtNet*, *Hyperallergic*, and *New York Magazine's The Cut*. She received the Franklin Furnace Fund (2017–18), NYFA Fellowship (2018), Jerome Hill Artist Fellowship (2021–22), was Professor of the Practice at Brown University (2021–22), and won the 2022 Chamberlain Award at Headlands Art Center. Residencies include Yaddo, Skowhegan, Vermont Studio Center, and Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop. Evans is currently a professor at Fordham University, Brooklyn College, and NYU.

Learn More

Visit our website for more information about *Ayana Evans: Endless Sunshine* including an **audio guide** from the artist.



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