

Marsh, Ariana, “For One Night, Lauren Halsey and Erykah Badu Turned the Hollywood Bowl Into a Funk Fantasia,”
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VOGUE



Photo: Timothy Norris

ARTS

For One Night, Lauren Halsey and Erykah Badu Turned the Hollywood Bowl Into a Funk Fantasia

BY ARIANA MARSH

September 30, 2026

On Monday afternoon, less than 24 hours before the debut of what was inarguably Lauren Halsey’s biggest artistic presentation to date, things were a little frenzied in her South Los Angeles workshop. When she signed on for our Zoom interview, members of her team could be seen weaving in and out of the frame behind her, carrying everything from a neon-painted pharaoh to a plastic light-up palm tree.

Halsey was overwhelmed, underwater—but she was also “floating.”

“There’s this level in funk where you’re ‘on the one,’” said the lifelong funkateer, a devotee of George Clinton’s Parliament-Funkadelic and its psychedelic, Afrofuturist universe. “You’ve reached your highest level of your interplanetary function, and that means everything is in the perfect flow. I feel like that even though I’m so stressed.”

The following evening, the artist, known for building maximalist architectural environments that sample and remix the signs, storefronts, symbols, people, and visual language of South Central LA, would attempt something the Hollywood Bowl had never seen before: a fine artist transforming the storied amphitheater and its grounds and staff uniforms into a world of her own making.

“Usually, the cadence for an art project is you get the work, you complete the work, you get the work to the gallery, and that’s the work,” Halsey said. This, however, was “a whole ecosystem.”

At the center of that world was Erykah Badu, who would be performing inside a sprawling modular set built from hundreds of



Lauren Halsey Photo: Allen Chen,
courtesy of Lauren Halsey

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objects Halsey and her team spent months making by hand, including a three-dimensional collage of technicolor palms, Egyptian forms, hand-painted signage, and monumental sculptures. “Things have become so digital,” said Halsey. “Things have become so flat that, like, I miss the handmade.”



Photo: Timothy Norris

The bill also included Anderson .Paak as DJ Pee .Wee, Flea, Halsey’s longtime friend and artistic hero Charles Gaines, and dancers from Debbie Allen Dance Academy. But the show was only part of it: Halsey’s takeover began before anyone took the stage, with the Bowl grounds transformed through sculpture, roller skating, miniature golf, basketball, airbrushing, and ping-pong. Meanwhile, custom, hand-dyed Agolde tablecloths covered the venue’s roughly 680 boxes, some 470 Bowl workers got Halsey-designed Agolde shirts, and stagehands traded their usual black for “really wild foil jumpsuits” and sculptural wigs. And then there were the “fireworks

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and lasers and all sorts of surprises.”

“Lauren is building this beautiful three-dimensional modular set, and I’m honored that she asked me to be the music inside of it,” Badu told *Vogue* ahead of the event. “I’ve performed at the Hollywood Bowl many times. But this time, I won’t be stepping into the Hollywood Bowl. I’ll be stepping into Lauren’s world.”



Erykah Badu Photo: Timothy Norris

Halsey calls that world *emajendat*, a concept she first realized on a large scale at London’s Serpentine South Gallery in 2024, where she turned the space into a technicolor “funk garden” that transported the visual language of South Central some 5,000 miles away. At the Serpentine, her usual motifs collided with prismatic floors and walls made from CDs, sand dunes, and fantastical sculptures, and even then she described *emajendat* as a project she planned to “continue to prototype and one day present at home, in Los Angeles.” Two years later, the Hollywood Bowl project represents the concept’s most ambitious iteration yet.

For all its interplanetary ambitions, though, Halsey’s *emajendat* is also unmistakably of Los Angeles, and of Halsey’s Los Angeles, in particular. Many of the activities spilling across the Bowl grounds were things she genuinely likes to do herself. (Of the mini golf element, for example, she explained: “There’s this adult mini golf spot on the Promenade, Santa Monica, called Holey Moley, and I can’t get enough of it.”) Her goal, she said, was to “build fun at the door.”

The Bowl itself has been part of Halsey’s Los Angeles for almost as long as she can remember. “It’s been the most iconic, dreamy venue since I’ve been a kid,” she said. “You go on field trips, and, you know, it’s the people’s venue. It’s open to the public.” She loves that you can show up when there isn’t even a performance happening. “You can go and have a sandwich and watch the LA Phil rehearse.”



Lauren Halsey’s EMAJENDAT -
Hollywood Bowl - September 29, 2026
Photo: Timothy Norris



The Hollywood Bowl by day. Photo: Timothy Norris

Halsey has made accessibility a priority in her own work, as well. Earlier this year, she opened *sister dreamer*, a free public sculpture park in South Central where nearly 22-foot Egyptian-style columns and sphinxes monumentalize her family, friends, mentors, and neighborhood heroes. Programmed by Summaeverythang Community Center, the nonprofit Halsey founded in 2019 around art, education, and wellness, the park is meant to be enjoyed as much as admired, with jazz performances, Kemeti yoga, art workshops, album-listening parties, and programming for kids. At the Bowl, she was working on a vastly different scale, but the impulse was much the same: to make the world, then invite people inside.

Halsey had been imagining some version of this collision between art and music for years. “I’ve always wanted to combine objects and musicians and a large audience,” she said. At first, the venue was beside the point, but then she started to think about where she would actually want to hear music. “I was like, well, let me intentionally choose my favorite place,” she said. “Let me see if I can get the Bowl to date me.”

A friend introduced her to Johanna Rees, the LA Phil’s vice president of programming and creative partnerships, and Halsey made her pitch. “She was like, ‘I can imagine that,’” Halsey recalled. “I was like, ‘Okay, well, let’s imagine it.’” The Bowl had worked with filmmakers, studios, and performing artists to create immersive experiences before, but had never invited a fine artist to bring in bespoke work and completely reimagine the space. There was, however, one rather important piece Halsey needed. “She was like, ‘Get a headliner,’” Halsey remembered.

Halsey had spent years deliberately building relationships with musicians she admired, often hiring them to play the after-parties for her exhibitions. Badu was already in that orbit. Halsey texted her a rendering of what she was imagining. “I was like, ‘Did you ever imagine performing in something like this?’” she said. “She was like, ‘Yeah, why not?’” When Halsey returned to Rees with Badu attached, the response was immediate: “Okay, boom, you got a show.”



The Hollywood Bowl's marquee on Tuesday night. Photo: Timothy Norris

The timing turned out to be divine. Badu and The Alchemist were already ending the West Coast run of their tour supporting their new collaborative album, *Before the World Blows*, a loose, psychedelic roil of hip-hop, soul, jazz, and funk that marks Badu's first full-length project in more than a decade. Halsey described the idea to Badu with two words: “funk opera.”

“My imagination went wild,” said Badu. “At the time, I could only imagine what that might look like, but as she began sharing images with me, I became totally clear on what we are doing. I won’t describe it to you. That is for you to see. That is the prestige. That is what you should anticipate.” As Halsey sent her images, the proposition became clearer. “Our synergy—what we have in sync for this particular show—is funk and the world of George Clinton,” Badu continued, referring to the Parliament-Funkadelic mastermind. “Lauren’s vision is visually what George Clinton’s music is sonically. I will fill in the blanks. I trust her completely. She is a perfect partner for me. This is a perfect marriage. We speak the same language.”

Perhaps the most audacious part of Halsey’s plan was that she didn’t consider Tuesday’s *emajendat* its final version. She called this first outing a “proof of concept” or “prototype,” something she can keep accumulating, evolving, and scaling. “It might start minimal—to the public that might look maximalist—but in my head it starts minimal,” she said. “And then year two, I add more to that. Year three I add more. Maybe by year five it’s a park, a street fair, and it has these tentacles throughout the city.” On Monday, her gears were already whirring. “I can’t wait to do it again.”

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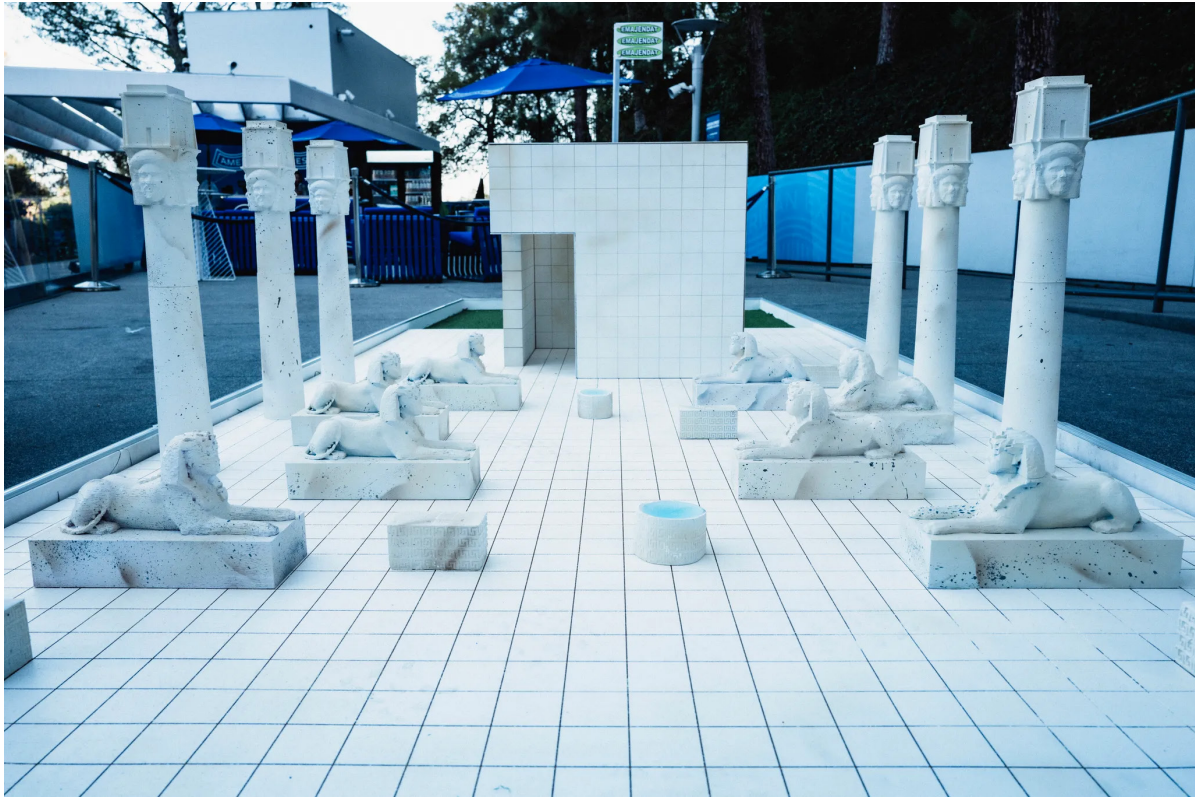


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