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Photographer to showcase project at Skidmore



Daesha Devón Harris Photo Provided

By Joseph Phelan, jphelan@digitalfirstmedia.com, [@jphelan13](#) on Twitter

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SARATOGA SPRINGS, N.Y.>> Daesha Devón Harris found her passion for photography in Saratoga Springs years ago. She returns this weekend to showcase her work in a project titled “I’ve Got a Home,” which will be presented Saturday at 10 a.m. in Case campus center at Skidmore.

As part of the John B. Moore Documentary Studies Collaborative (MDOCS) Documentary Storytellers’ Institute across Skidmore College’s campus, Harris cannot wait to share her work with the community.

“I’m really proud to be here at Storytellers’ Institute, which takes people from all over the country and to be able to be here in my hometown,” said Harris. “It’s just really special and I’m happy to represent for Saratoga here at Skidmore.”

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Harris took a photography class with Eric Hotaling her junior year.

“We had one of the best teachers on the face of the earth at Saratoga Springs High School,” said Harris. “As soon as I saw the photo appear in the developer in the dark room, that was when I was fixated on photography.”

A year later she was introduced to her biggest influence, Gordon Parks, when she realized documentary photography was what she wanted to do.

“I kind of naturally just gravitated toward documenting the every day goings on,” said Harris. “I started by just taking my camera every where with me and photographing my friends and family and just everything along the way that I saw happen in Saratoga.”

Harris said her work over the past 10-15 years focused around the idea of home, in particular the role gentrification played in Saratoga Springs.

“I was just watching the affect on everybody but in particular on the community of color because it hurt them first and the hardest, so I watched a lot of my family, friends and community members get pushed out,” said Harris. “I wanted to start photographing that.”

Her titled work was a partial line in an old Negro spiritual called “I Got a Home in That Work. Before Harris’s documentary photographs focused on city views, and how the gentrification happened in terms of different developments that happened throughout Saratoga Springs.

“This series focuses on people in their actual home,” said Harris. “It’s individual portraits accompanied by historical photographs.”

The Storytellers’ Institute altogether is a five-week summer program for documentarians, college undergraduates and faculty. The highlight features a weekend-long documentary free Festosium that began Thursday, June 8 and runs through June 11.

The theme this year deals with Space and Place.

“One of the documentary’s amazing capabilities is exploring space and place, and kind of transporting viewers to places that they may not otherwise have access to, and also bringing them closer to spaces and places that they are already intimately related to,” said newly named director of the Documentary Storytellers’ Institute Sarah Friedland. “I think it’s extremely important to explore and dig deeply into space and place because it’s such an essential part of documentary work. And all kinds of documentary mediums, so film, photographs, interactive work. Kind of exploring space and place is always at the heart of it.”

Friedland, along with her co-worker Esy Casey, showcased their documentary titled “Here After” to kick-off the weekend Thursday night.

The documentary details three stories of three unique cemeteries Florida, New York and Texas.

Friedland discovered MDOCS at a conference called Visible Evidence when she was blown away by the work that they did. She decided to apply to the director position because of it.

Outside of “Here After,” Friedland has been working on “5 x Lyd,” a cinematic portrait of the rippling impacts of displacement, war and occupation on one city in Israel/Palestine, over the last several years.

She sees the importance of documentaries.

“I think documentaries are increasingly important today because although so much of our world is documented in different ways, either through surveillance or Facebook or the ways that we document each other. To have a really intentional, well-told story is a whole other thing, and we hope to do here at the Storytellers’ Institute is really to be able to engage in all those different forms of storytelling ethically, rigorously and to train people to find their voice in storytelling and to think about the different ways that documentaries are used in the world today which are growing more and more,” said Friedland. “It’s a place where makers can engage critically with all different kinds of documentary making and also think about how they want to tell the stories that they want to tell and why they would tell those stories.”

For a list of events this weekend, visit <http://mdocs.skidmore.edu/storytellers/festosium/schedule/>

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