

# FINAL DAYS









## **Esther Raushenbush Library Gallery | Sarah Lawrence College**



**This publication was created for the exhibit FINAL DAYS including collaboration and wall labels at Esther Raushenbush Library Gallery, Sarah Lawrence College.**  
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# **Contributors**

**Dr. Hasna Muhammad**

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# Contents

<b>Curatorial Statement</b> <b>Kishauna Soljour, Ph.D.</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Artist Statement</b> <b>Dr. Hasna Muhammad</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Artist Biography</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Final Days Images</b>	<b>10-22</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>24</b>



# Curatorial Statement

FINAL DAYS navigates the ephemeral and the eternal. This installation captures never-seen-before images of personal, ceremonial, and farewell rituals. On display are multiple works in a range of media including photography, archival artifacts and a soundtrack with multiple interviews, music, and sound. The exhibit explores the delicate boundary between public and private life. Dr. Hasna Muhammad has captured the immortality of family members, friends, and loved ones. In her work, the viewer experiences the evanescence of life. This project is haunting and poetic. It provokes a range of emotions from sadness to joy. The photographs created for this exhibition reveal the deep legacies of sacrifice, love and community.

Kishauna Soljour, Ph.D.



# Artist Statement

My father passed away unexpectedly on Friday, February 4, 2005, and we had six ceremonial celebrations of his final days: a private wake at McClanahan's Funeral Home; a public viewing at Abyssinian Baptist Church; a public funeral at The Riverside Church; the private Mason's ceremony; a private cremation service at Ferncliff Cemetery; and the private temporary burial of his ashes in the front yard of our family home. Because I wanted to hold on to my father; because I wanted to remember everything that happened—what I saw, what I felt; and because I am a photographer, I made hundreds of images during those final days as well as the days that surrounded them.

I made hundreds more photographs for the same reason when my mother passed away nine years later. For her final days, we held a private funeral at McClanahan's, her private cremation service at Ferncliff, and her public memorial service at The Riverside Church. As my parents requested, we privately co-mingled their ashes and placed them into one urn which we subsequently buried at Ferncliff Cemetery at the 11th and last ceremony of their final days.

The Casket (Lowering the Lid) was taken during the moment when the family closed the lid of my mother's casket for the last time. The Public was taken in a stairwell at Abyssinian Baptist Church where through leaded glass windows I saw other photographers taking photos of my father's casket in the hearse on the street below. The People was made when I was giving remarks from the chancel at Riverside Church during my father's funeral.

FINAL DAYS creates a private healing space and a public tribute to the legacies of my parents, Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee, as well as other family members, friends, and loved ones. The images in this exhibit contain photographs of the final days of my parents, my father-in-law, Pearlee Saunders; my father friend, Dr. Beny Primm; my friend Sara Myers; Lt. Michael Davidson; my parents' friend, Max Roach; and my Uncle Sir Sidney Poitier. FINAL DAYS shares some of the personal, ceremonial, and farewell rituals that they wanted for themselves and that we wanted for them.



# Artist Biography



HASNA MUHAMMAD is a visual artist, writer, and educator whose work focuses on family, social justice, education, and the human condition. Her photography has been exhibited in various cities in the United States, and her writing has been published in Medium, Essence Magazine, at Sankofa.org, and in Crisis Magazine. Her book, ***Breathe In the Sky: Poems Prayers & Photographs*** will be published in the fall of 2022.

Hasna is an education activist and the founder of Education As Justice, an organization that seeks to elevate and amplify education on the social justice platform. Throughout her career, she has served as an English and writing teacher, a high school principal, and an assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and human resources. Hasna also taught executive leadership, diversity management, and community engagement at the graduate level. Hasna currently provides professional preparation for individuals and organizations that focus on diversifying executive, educational, and civic leadership forces.

Hasna grew up in New Rochelle, New York and now lives in Brewster, New York where she and her husband raised three children. Hasna received her B.A. from Sarah Lawrence College and completed her M.A. and Ed.D. at Teachers College, Columbia University. Hasna is a 2018-2019 Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture Fellow and a 2022 Moth Storyteller.

To learn about current and upcoming projects, please visit <https://www.birthmarkmedia.com/>





The Cortege  
Ossie Davis  
8" X 10"  
Archival Inkjet Paper  
2005



SCAN ME





The Tears  
Dr. Beny J. Primm  
8" X 10"  
Archival Inkjet Paper  
2005





The March  
Sir Sidney Poitier  
12" X 18"  
Archival Digital Pigment Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag Paper  
2022







The Public  
Ossie Davis  
11" x 17"  
Archival Digital Pigment Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag Paper  
2005





The Tribute  
Ossie Davis  
8" X 10"  
Archival Inkjet Paper  
2015







The Scattering  
Sara Myers  
12" X18"  
Archival Digital Pigment Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag Paper  
2017







The Alphas  
Dr. Beny J. Primm  
12" X18"  
Archival Digital Pigment Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag Paper  
2015





The Casket  
Ruby Dee  
12" x 18"  
Archival Digital Pigment  
Print on Hahnemühle  
Photo Rag Paper  
2014



The Honor  
Lt. Michael R. Davidson  
8" X 10"  
Archival Inkjet Paper  
2018







**T**here were so many times when my father let go of my hand in order to take the hand of one of you. A few of those times I impatiently wondered why he let go of me in order to take in one of you. He was my Daddy. As I grew older I realized that Daddy belonged to you too. You needed to hear what he said to us. You needed him to speak up. You needed him to represent you, to forge a way, to be the example. You needed him to be who he was for us –a griot, an encyclopedia, a voice of reason and outrage. You needed him to be your brother, your father, and your son; your black man. Over the past few days, people have been thanking us for sharing Daddy. And I'd like to say officially that the pleasure is all ours. We thank him for sharing you with us. You were the characters in the stories he told us and in the lessons he taught. Your resilience, your fortitude, your art, and your humor were the content of our exchanges with him. He

shared you with us all these years, and we would not have it any other way. We are better human beings for it. We are so grateful for what we learned about you from Daddy. Not only about being strong black men and women, but also and more importantly about being good human beings and responsible tenants of this world. Since you have been such an integral part of our family, I'd like to make you an official part of our family by adding your picture to our family photo album. I'm going to take a picture. Sit up straight. Fix your clothes. You in the back, squeeze in. Say cheese.

**February 12, 2005**

Insert photo by Frank Stewart



**The People (From the Chancel)**  
**Ossie Davis**  
 20" x 14"  
 Archival Digital Pigment Print  
 2005





The Salute (At the Crematorium)

Ossie Davis

12" X18"

Archival Digital Pigment Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag Paper

2005





The Body  
Ruby Dee Davis  
12" X 18"  
Archival Digital Pigment  
Print on Hahnemühle  
Photo Rag Paper  
2014





The Crowd  
Ossie Davis  
11" X 14"  
Archival Digital Pigment Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag Paper  
2005









## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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**Esther Raushenbush Library Gallery**

**Sarah Lawrence College  
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# FINAL DAYS

ESTHER RAUSHENBUSH GALLERY | SARAH LAWRENCE COLLEGE ESTHER RAUSHENBUSH LIBRARY  
1 MEAD WAY, BRONXVILLE, NY 10708

## The Farewell

12" x 18"

Archival Digital Pigment Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag Paper  
2005





