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ARTS IN REVIEW



The Memorial to Enslaved Laborers, designed by Höweler + Yoon, is infused throughout with symbolism

classifications. Blank lines have been left, to be filled in as new entries trickle in. But even the full names that we have tell us essentially nothing: What, for example, do we know of the life of Thrimston Herr? Still, to have recovered their names from historical oblivion is a crucial first step.

Another set of inscriptions runs along a low stone bench that forms a second inner circle. These form a timeline of events from 1619 to 1865, and the entries are appropriately lapidary. For example, "1850: Three students attack a twelve-year-old enslaved girl in a field near UVA. The students are expelled." There is no commentary, and only the imagination and empathy of the viewer can supply it.

These are the essential components of the memorial. Other elements include a pair of nearby footpaths, one aligned with the setting sun on March 3 (the date in 1865 when Union troops arrived in Charlottesville) and another with the North Star, which guided the escape route northward to freedom. The grove of trees that forms the setting, we learn from the memorial's website, represents a "hush harbor," the forest clearing where slaves "convened for religious rituals, communal gathering and to arrange escape." And along the inner stone bench runs a channel of water representing, among other things, escape by river or sea.

In a lesser memorial, this hubbub of symbolism (there is also a barely visible face on the outside of the enclosure) might drown out the central theme, as did the allegorical overkill of the Eisenhower Memorial in Washington, this year's other important commemorative site. A successful memorial should be self-explanatory, and state clearly "this is what we honor," and not "the circus has come to town." Höweler + Yoon have succeeded because of the strength of their central motif. In effect, it is a cenotaph—the Greek word for empty tomb—the type of memorial you build when you do not have the body. It presents a formidable presence even as it speaks of fathomless absence.

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ARCHITECTURE REVIEW  
**Building Up Their Memory**

A memorial honors the thousands of slaves who constructed the University of Virginia

By MICHAEL J. LEWIS

Charlottesville, Va. **IN A YEAR OF FALLING** memorials, it is surprising to see an ambitious one rise. The Memorial to Enslaved Laborers (2016-20) commemorates the roughly 5,000 slaves who built the University of Virginia and toiled on its campus here until their liberation at the end of the Civil War. Such a troubling theme could easily have been turned into political poster art. Instead it has given us something rare these days, a memorial worthy of the name, one that stands boldly on the campus to speak movingly of tragedy, suffering, and the dignity of the human spirit.

The University of Virginia was the inspired creation of Thomas Jefferson, whose campus is itself a textbook of architecture. He aligned ten pavilions, each in a different classical style, to face one another across his celebrated Lawn. Here, above their classrooms, lived the professors, while students lived in smaller rooms between the pavilions. All were drawn together by a continuous colonnade, culminating at one end in Jefferson's great rotunda, a paraphrase of the Roman Pantheon that served as the university library. The other end was open to a view of the Virginia countryside, juxtaposing nature and civilization. The ensemble has been called America's finest man-made object and is justly famous. Less well known is that the campus literally rested on slavery, the cellar of each pavilion housing its professor's own team of slaves, invisible

from the lawn.

In 2012, the university launched a comprehensive study of that slave force, to assess its contribution and to identify as many individuals as possible. This proved maddeningly difficult. The overwhelming majority of that population remains poignantly nameless, and the handful of names we do know are usually the result of incidental mentions. Even the skilled builder who raised the mighty roof trusses of several of the pavilions is recorded only as "Sam the carpenter." The present memorial was created to give tangible expression to this great gap in the historical record.

Höweler + Yoon, the architects

who headed the team that included Mabel C. Wilson, a scholar and architect who specializes in the intersection of race and design, found a site near Jefferson's Rotunda, which gave them their point of departure. They repeated its dimensions to make a circular enclosure, bounded by a wall of gray Virginia granite and open to the sky. The wall slants sharply, inside and out, rising eight feet at its highest, a pointed reference to the height of Jefferson's famous serpentine brick walls, which hid from view the slave yard behind each of his pavilions. At the other end, the wall almost touches the ground and parts to allow en-

trance. The center is empty and planted in grass, forming its own tightly constricted lawn—more pointed commentary?—that serves as a space for public gathering. Viewed from above, the almost continuous circle does double duty; it is at once a reference to Jefferson's Rotunda and to a broken shackle.

The most affecting part of the memorial is the fragmentary list of names inscribed along its inner wall, which recalls the mournful roster on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. But while those individuals are meticulously recorded, most here are represented only by first names, nicknames, and job

