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sound

ON THE MALL



THE NEWEST SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION BUILDING might be the last of its kind.

The 400,000-sq.-ft. Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) is situated at the center of the National Mall, near the Washington Monument, in Washington, D.C., and will house exhibition space for U.S. African American history and culture, as well as host ceremonies and performances. It may also be the last Smithsonian Museum to be constructed on the Mall itself, as it occupies the last available space set aside for museums.

SteelFab, Inc. (an AISC Member/Certified fabricator) fabricated 4,050 tons of structural steel for the museum, and Bosworth Steel (an AISC Member/Certified erector) erected roughly 75% of the project's structural steel. The building has no perimeter columns, and the cantilevered floor levels are suspended from the large gallery roof. A grand, long-span "porch" at the south entry point (using 200 tons of steel) represents a common gathering place of the American South and consists of another cantilevered structure supported by two super-columns. Architects for the project include Adjaye Associates, Davis Brody Bond, The Freelon Group and SmithGroup JJR, with Silman Associates as the structural engineer.

Referring to the striking shape of the building, collaborating architect David Adjaye says, "The form of the building suggests a very upward mobility. And when you look at the way the circulation works, everything lifts you up into the light. This is not a story about past trauma. For me, the story is one that's extremely uplifting as a kind of world story."

Adjaye notes that structural steel supports the building's façade, which is made up of 3,600 painted alloy panels that feature an African textile pattern. The bronze color reflects the African-American guilds of casting and ironworking that emerged in the South after the Civil War. The museum is scheduled to open this year. For more about the project, including a live construction webcam, visit nmaahc.si.edu. ■