

Arnos Vale cemetery summons the dead to provide light at the end of the tunnel



The silent residents of the Arnos Vale cemetery in the UK may get a chance to put in some after-life work hours powering the graveyard’s new lighting system.

A research team from Columbia University (CU) in the US has won a competition, organised by the University of Bath’s (UoB) Centre for Death and Society, to reimagine the historic resting grounds, opened near Bristol in 1836.

The vision of the winning team is to install a series of lights in the wooded areas around the graveyard, each powered by an urn containing “biomass”, or the cremated remains of an individual.

According to the idea’s creators – including CU’s School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation, DeathLab, and Latent Productions – the lighting system, dubbed Sylvan Constellation, would serve as an enlightening memorial to those providing the power to the lamps.

John Troyer, director of the UoB Centre for Death and Society, said that the technology to dispose of people’s remains and the way they are memorialised has changed throughout history and the Future Cemetery project would bring Arnos Vale to the 21st Century.

“The Sylvan Constellation design is an outstanding mix of both respectful disposition for human remains and longer term thinking. It is also a great opportunity for Columbia University’s DeathLAB, LATENT Productions in New York City, the University of Bath’s Centre for Death and Society and Arnos Vale Cemetery to collaborate,” he told *Bristol Post* newspaper.

“By working together on this project, collaborators will establish networks for longer-term projects involving innovative, sustainable design around end-of-life planning.”

The team will receive a £5,000 (€6,365) prize and month-long contract to research the cemetery in order to design a prototype of the lighting system.

According to Karla Rothstein from CU’s DeathLab, their goal is to develop a cemetery that celebrates the vitality of life in an environmentally responsible manner.

“DeathLAB was founded to produce environmentally responsible projects that reweave the ubiquity of death into the fabric of our cities, reminding us of our mortal finitude and the responsibility the living share to fortify our collective future,” she said.

In addition to illuminating Arnos Vale, the Sylvan Constellation also includes plans to store digital data of the deceased’s online presence into each lamp.