

Researchers reimagine the future cemetery at Arnos Vale



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Environmental Sciences - Careers/Employment

How will the dead be disposed of and remembered in years to come?

A recent design competition, organised through the University's Centre for Death & Society, which sought to reimagine a future cemetery drawing on architectural and technological innovations has been won by international colleagues at Columbia University for a design that could revolutionise future memorialisation.

The proposal, entitled 'Sylvan Constellation' which was submitted by Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, envisages a network of memorial vessels which would transform biomass into an elegant and perpetually renewing constellation of light which could illuminate pathways.

The team, based in New York, won a £5,000 prize and a month long summer 2016 residency during which they will research the historic 42-acre Arnos Vale Cemetery and work with the University of Bath's Centre for Death and Society as well as the Pervasive Media Studio at the Watershed.

The aim is to work towards a feasible design for a future prototype.

Dr John Troyer, Director of the University of Bath's Centre for Death and Society and co-founder of the Future Cemetery explains: "The Sylvan Constellation design by Columbia University's GSAPP DeathLAB and LATENT Productions in New York City is an outstanding mix of both respectful disposition for human remains and longer term thinking around the disposal of digital data.

"The proposal captured the Future Cemetery design competition's larger themes by presenting a mix of different sustainable technologies. 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.



'Sylvan Constellation' - submitted by Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation. How a future cemetery could look.

"By working together on this project, collaborators will establish networks for longer-term projects involving innovative, sustainable design around end-of-life planning. The collaboration will also demonstrate how Arnos Vale Cemetery is a sector leader in creating new possibilities for heritage site cemeteries while continuing to operate as a working cemetery.

"This is an exciting time to be working on design projects that fully embrace topics like death, dying, and dead bodies and I very much look forward to seeing collaborations like this develop."

Karla Rothstein, founder and director of Columbia University's DeathLAB and design director at LATENT Productions will be visiting Bath and Bristol in spring 2016.

She says: "Our team at DeathLAB and LATENT Productions is honoured to have Sylvan Constellation at Arnos Vale selected as the 'first future cemetery.' Our goal is to offer elegant options at death that are commensurate with the social and environmental values we respect while alive. Our proposal aims to secure civic space for the future metropolis, allowing one's last impactful act to gracefully and responsibly celebrate the vitality of life.

"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. We appreciate Future Cemetery and Arnos Vale's optimistic support of the cultural shifts that our work embodies."

Mike Coe, Chief Executive of Arnos Vale in Bristol added: "We are looking forward to hosting Sylvan Constellation at Arnos Vale and welcome the opportunity this provides us. As a recognised centre of future focussed, sustainable cemetery enterprise, I believe the work of Karla and her team fits with our pioneering but respectful objectives and values."