

After the Palace: A Necropolis of Return

Harriet Hariss | Naomi House | Heidi Lu

The Chamber of Accounting
Records the material and ecological debts embedded within the original Great Exhibition.

The Compost Atrium
Houses the Sarcophagus itself: a porous structure of compressed waste and mycelial growth that gradually collapses over the exhibition period.

The Return Field
Redistributes decomposed matter toward rewilding, remediation, and restoration sites across former extraction zones.

Sarcophagus: A Post-Colonial Architecture of Decomposition

After the Palace proposes a counter-monument: a Sarcophagus constructed from post-colonial waste streams and organic matter, designed not for permanence but for decomposition, neither mausoleum nor monument, the Sarcophagus is conceived as a living funerary architecture for the afterlives of empire.



Extraction Era 1750 -1850

Iron Ore territories
UK + Imperial extraction networks

Transport + Logistics
Imperial shipping routes moved materials and bodies



Timber becomes rewilding infrastructure - elm tree saplings, pleached together, are situated where each column of the palace once stood

Textiles + Stolen Goods
Displayed artefacts, crafts, dyes from colonised worlds.
Textiles become compost and seed carriers

CANNOT BE RETURNED
Human Labour
6000 workers assembled the palace in 17 weeks



The Chamber of Accounting

Its form recalls both sarcophagus and scaffold—a suspended chamber for collective mourning and material unmaking.

The Compost Atrium

Counter - Monumental Composting Sarcophagus

The Return Field

Replanting the Crystal Palace: Rows of Elm trees are planted in a precise grid to mark the structural rhythm of the palace

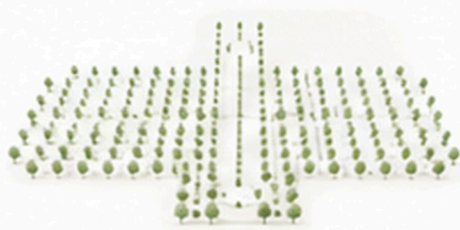
Glass returns to silica landscapes.

Iron returns to former coal and ore territories

Visitors do not encounter static artefacts, but active processes of transformation: fungal growth overtaking structural surfaces, biodegradable membranes softening under rain, seeds germinating from compressed waste blocks, and fragments of colonial debris dissolving back into soil.

Histories of colonial violence and extraction can be seen.

redistributes decomposed matter toward rewilding, remediation, and restoration sites across former extraction zones.



1 - 5 years



10 -20 years



25 - 40 years



50 - 75 years



75+ years