

Katti Williams

Arch of Triumph and Void of Mourning: Symbolic Space in WWI Memorials



The traditional association of the triumphal arch with glorious victory was problematic for the commemoration of a war where victory was not glorious because of the immense loss of life involved. It was therefore necessary for architects to shift the tenor of the symbolism of the arch away from triumph towards loss. The most complex use of the triumphal arch theme in Great War memorials is found in Sir Edwin Lutyens' Memorial to the Missing at Thiepval on the Somme, and there is an inventive use of the theme in the War Memorial in Adelaide. This paper explores the way the architects and interpreters of these monuments have sought new meanings for the triumphal arch motif, ranging from 'the open mouth of death' to 'portals to an eventual healing'. It concludes that the most significant of these is the capacity of the arch to be read as a symbolic space, a void that embodies absence, the absence of a loved one—son, brother, or father—experienced by those at home in Britain or Australia.

Monday 8 May

6.45 pm

Room 148 Elisabeth Murdoch Building

All Welcome