

SAH Fellow – Swati Chattopadhyay (written by Dianne Harris, Senior Program Officer, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation)

It is my great pleasure this evening to speak about the many contributions made by Dr. Swati Chattopadhyay to the fields of architectural and urban history and theory.

An outstanding scholar who works across multiple disciplinary realms—and more about that in a moment—Swati’s career is marked by the generosity of citizenship that can be seen in her contributions to her department, university, and to our field more broadly. She served a four-year term as Chair of the Department of History of Art and Architecture at the University of California at Santa Barbara where she has been a member of faculty since 1997, and where she has also served on countless committees, mentored faculty and students, and led important initiatives including the Subaltern-Popular Workshop. She has served on or chaired more than seven committees for the Society of Architectural Historians, and was our journal editor from 2011-2014—a job widely acknowledged as among the most labor-intensive of any of the SAH’s service commitments.

Over the past 25 years, Swati has become a leading scholar of colonial and postcolonial South Asian cities and cultural landscapes, and of the landscape of 19th and 20th-century British Imperialism in the South Asian context. The interdisciplinary structure and multi-cultural approach of her work has permitted her to forge new realms of inquiry linking questions about visual culture and urban environments/cultural landscapes with those focusing on politics, media formations, and environmental change. Indeed, one of Swati’s intellectual strengths is her ability to help bring theory to life by showing us the material dimensions of political, social, and cultural change. Her groundbreaking and award-winning publications include *Representing Calcutta*, which has distinguished itself as required reading for anyone interested in the history of South Asian cities, colonialism/post-colonial urbanism, and architectural history. Her second book, *Unlearning the City*, is of signal importance for scholars of South Asian cities, cultures of representation, and urban forms of knowledge. She recently published another book, *City Halls and Civic Materialisms*, and she is now completing two books, the first titled, “*Geography of Small Spaces*,” and her Guggenheim-funded project, “*Nature’s Infrastructure: British Empire and the Making of the Gangetic Plains, 1760-1880*.” By looking at the Ganges through an inventive set of lenses, Swati aims to reinvent the ways we know the operations of colonization. Her scholarship has been repeatedly recognized with and supported by some of the most prestigious awards and fellowships in our field and in the humanities including a J. Paul Getty Postdoctoral Fellowship, Fellowships at the Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities, the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Studies, and the University of London, and most recently with a Guggenheim Fellowship.

With her ceaselessly inquisitive mind that demands exacting and innovative answers to complex problems, Swati has become a preeminent scholar in the field of architectural and urban history. She is an exemplary scholar whose publications will continue to make a significant impact across architectural history, urban history, and across multiple fields in the humanities. It is my delight and my pleasure to be here tonight as she becomes a Fellow of the Society of Architectural Historians.