

## ISAS Public Lecture Series



### **From Craftsmanship to Commercial Art: The New Vocations of Design in Late Colonial India**

a talk by

**Tapati Guha-Thakurta**

Director and Professor in History, Centre for  
Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta)

**ABSTRACT:** Positioning itself in the early decades of the 20th century in Bengal, the lecture will track a critical transition in the vocation of ‘design’ in colonial India from the realm of handicrafts and the artisanal arts to a new social space of middle class training and practice. It will reflect on the way the skills of designing comes to occupy a new median space between those of ‘fine arts’ and ‘crafts’ within the structures of art pedagogy, and the way a new figure of the professional designer emerges in these years in the early guise of the commercial artist. With a focus on the new “Art in Industry” movement in Calcutta of the 1940s, that served as the country’s pioneering corporate forum for the promotion of commercial design, the lecture will look back at two main trends – (i) the discursive shift from the 19th century category of the “industrial/decorative arts” that dominated the colonial Indian art administration to the new livelihoods of modern graphic and commercial art that are nurtured by the Government School of Art, Calcutta during the 1920s and 30s (ii) the negotiations between the traditional aesthetics of the ‘ornamental’ and the new aesthetics of the ‘modern’ that shapes the art of design and advertising in mid 20th century Bengal.

**SPEAKER BIO:** Tapati Guha-Thakurta is Professor in History and was the Director of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta (CSSSC) from 2012 to 2017. Her two main books are *The Making of a New ‘Indian’ Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal* (Cambridge University Press, 1992) and *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (Columbia University Press, and Permanent Black, 2004).

**Friday, September 28, 2018**

**4:30 - 6:30 pm**

**10 Stephens Hall, ( For directions look up “Institute for  
South Asia Studies” on Google Maps )**