After completing his bachelor of architecture degree at the University of Oregon in 1952, pioneering Bengali architect Muzharul Islam returned home to find a postcolonial Pakistan embroiled in acrimonious politics of national identity. It was not surprising that his acclaimed architectural project, the Institute of Fine Arts (1953) in Dhaka, generally considered the harbinger of a Bengali modernism—a sort of local Villa Savoye—would partake in this political debate. Beginning with the Institute of Fine Arts, this lecture chronicles Muzharul Islam’s crucial contribution to the architectural development of Bangladesh and the secular humanist ethos of Bengal that framed it.

Adnan Morshed received his PhD from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s History, Theory, and Criticism of Architecture and Art Program. He is currently associate professor at the Catholic University of America’s School of Architecture and Planning in Washington, DC, where he teaches the history of architecture, architectural theory, and design. He has served on the board of directors of the Society of Architectural Historians, on the jury for National Endowment for the Humanities grants, and, recently, chaired the committee for the 2015 Alice Davis Hitchcock Book Award. He has been awarded highly competitive fellowships and grants—among others, the Wyeth Fellowship at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, National Gallery of Art; the Smithsonian Institution; Wolfsonian-Florida International University; Graham Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities, and MIT. He is the author of Impossible Heights: Skyscrapers, Flight, and the Master Builder (University of Minnesota Press, 2015) and Oculus: A Decade of Insights into Bangladeshi Affairs (2012). In 2012, he led the Society of Architectural Historians’ study tour to three South Asian cities: Dhaka, Delhi, and Chandigarh. Currently, he serves on the board of the $1 million Andrew Mellon Foundation grant to MIT’s Global Architecture History Teaching Collaborative. A practicing architect and urbanist, Adnan Morshed has designed buildings in the United States, Lebanon, Malaysia, and Bangladesh. The lectures are free and open to the public.