



A couple of years ago, I was on my phone looking for art residencies where I could learn hands-on how to paint large scale murals.

It was a dream for me to create those one day — as I myself was a budding self-taught artist with a penchant for street art. And maybe one day, find Dhaka highlighted with art, colour, and voice amidst the chaos.

I believe in the healing power of beauty and in art. I experienced how making art as a new hobby contributed to my personal growth and have witnessed examples throughout history and modern era how art can improve the lives of communities.

Ever since I got into painting, I was keen about mural arts and street art as a form of public art installation. I have seen around the world and read extensively across different economic contexts how the presence of street art positively impacts the well-being and productivity of a community. For instance, Medellin in Colombia, a town torn apart by the legacy of drug lord Pablo Escobar was decorated by public art to better community reintegration,

morale and drawing tourists and business attraction in, and it had worked successfully among many other examples across the globe.

My search led me to the incredible work by The Fearless Collective, a movement of participative story-telling involving large beautiful community murals. The murals were created in conjunction with the marginalised communities that the murals represent, in strong, empowering narratives. Spearheaded by artist Shilo Shiv Suleman, Fearless had visions of

expanding their methodology to South Asia. An art residency was to be conducted, and I immediately applied. With my passion and dabbling in murals to represent vulnerable communities, and general interest in street art, I aligned immediately with the Collective.

However, the COVID-19 outbreak started soon after, and despite several bonding moments over Zoom calls, the residency got postponed indefinitely. Two years later, we finally got a call to ask who were still interested, and I found my way to Sri Lanka to join a magical cohort of other strong female artists and trailblazers from India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, with me representing Bangladesh.

Even though I have never been to another art residency, I along with the other artists immediately felt this was going to be an extraordinary 10 days. Over the next few days, we began unpacking ourselves, and the histories we separately embodied. For the first three days, the nine women artists from across South Asia shared our personal and political histories, where we came from and the movements we now stand in. We spoke about the fears and the resistance movements in our countries.



# THE FEARLESS COLLECTIVE: Memoir of an artist in Sri Lanka amidst the economic crisis