

ART AS A SIDE HUSTLE AND THE STUDENTS WHO MAKE IT WORK

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We're often told that in order to retain the enjoyment of our hobbies, we should refrain from turning them into a means of income. While this sentiment is not unfounded, turning our hobbies into sources of income often means that we'll enjoy our downtime and simultaneously earn some cash. Of course, implementing this in reality isn't as easy as it sounds, especially for students who have academic responsibilities to carry out, as running a business takes up a great portion of time.

That isn't to say there aren't students who make it work. Running a business full-time is not feasible for most, but many students throughout the country have their own side hustles going. From selling baked goods or home-cooked foods to putting original artworks on sale- students have almost all bases covered. Selling artwork and crafts, specifically, is becoming more and more popular by the day. This can include digital and physical art such as canvas paintings and portraits, jewellery, crocheted items, trinkets, hand-embroidered items, etc. Some choose to utilise unorthodox art mediums as well, such as painting on stones or logs or other everyday items.

Social media lends students a lucrative platform to advertise and sell their products. Many artists have gotten their start by sharing a simple photo of their creations, and the enthusiastic reception from friends and acquaintances has given them the confidence to take on their business venture. Lahmee Tairim, a student of Finance at Dhaka University, is one such artist.

Lahmee owns a page called *bakbakummm* on Instagram and Facebook, where she shares and sells



embroidered crafts such as jewellery, wall hangings, and other accessories. Being interested in needlework since childhood, she picked it back up as a way to fill her idle time, drawing inspiration from Pinterest and other platforms. When she shared her work on her personal social media pages, she received encouragement as well as customised orders from friends and acquaintances. This influenced her to start selling her craft, noticing a lack of embroidered jewellery in the market. However, being a full-time student, she has to work around her academic duties and is forced to limit herself to a certain number of orders per month.

"I love needlework, creating new designs using a needle is very fun, so I run this page as a hobby. Hence, I don't take that many orders, only about 15-16 pieces a month on average. Because of academics, I don't invest a lot of time in my tiny business. I spend around three to four hours on each piece."

Other than social media, fairs and festivals organised in universities is a good way for students to get their start. Tahsina Islam, a student of Pharmacy at BRAC University (BRACU), started her business at the fairs and events organised by the institution. Since then, she has branched her business outside her university, attending fairs hosted by other universities as well, and growing her online page. Her stall, *Protikritii*, is a versatile onewherewhich you can find paintings on canvases, wood, and stone, as well as resin jewellery, key charms, and various other craft items.

"My friends were my biggest inspiration, whenever I crafted something new, they would tell me to start a business. When I saw students running their stalls at BRACU's fests, I decided to give it a try. Since my products are handmade, it's difficult to run a business on the side when my academics are on full throttle, which is why I'm not very active on my online page. When there's a fest imminent at BRACU, North South University, or East West University, I work for about 10-12 hours at a time. Generally, there's at least one fest a month, so I end up generating enough money for my pocket allowance and caretaking of my pets," says Tahsina.

Tahsina has plans for expansion beyond fairs and fests, hoping to one day run a showroom of her handmade products. Many students consider their small business a start for something they can hopefully grow into a much bigger venture. Owning a business is a beacon of hope for many as they seek to escape the cookie-cutter 9 to 5 life.

Nafisa Alam Toree, a student of Business and Technology Management at the Islamic University of Technology and the owner of *Arts by Toree*, hopes to expand her small business of selling paintings and focus on it long term. Finding



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catharsis in her art, she started her business with the motto "colours have the healing power".

Nafisa shares, "I learned how to paint as a kid, but had to stop during college. Thanks to the immense pressure during my admission phase, I sought escape in my paintings. Encouragement from friends and family kept me going as I started selling paintings of the sky and mandalas.

Eventually, faceless portraits based on photos sent in by customers became my most popular products, and I plan on expanding my art to other media as well."

While some have concrete plans to take their endeavours to higher heights in the future, some are just enjoying the ride as they go. Zakia Sultana Zannat, a former student of Mirpur Girls College, runs a page called *crochetouille.co*, where she sells her crocheted items.

"I used to make crocheted items for my friends as birthday gifts and eventually decided that I could try to get some money out of it since I didn't have any other jobs. I like crocheting, and so I thought maybe I could make people happy by making them customised crocheted products. I don't have a lot of followers yet, but I have had wonderful experiences with customers and even made new friends through running this business," Zakia says.

Crocheting is a time-consuming and intricate craft. While some products can be completed within two hours, Zakia

says that some may take up to 48 hours, which is why the biggest challenge she faces is delivering her products on time.

She adds, "Growing my business eventually would be nice, but I'm not thinking of that yet as I am content with the work I do, and I would rather not compromise the quality of my work by taking too many orders at once. The name of my page is inspired by *Ratatouille*, which is a very cute and fun film. That is also how I want my page to be perceived, so the positive reviews and happiness of my customers upon receiving their products is what keeps me going."

A recurring theme found in the anecdotes of all these artists is that profit tends to take a backseat for them, fulfilment and accessibility being their priority. Although most of their businesses have a certain profit margin, keeping prices student-friendly takes precedence.

A general challenge while running a handmade product business is mass production. Most of these artists work alone, and a lot of time, love, and care goes into each piece. Depending on the nature of the craft, sourcing materials for products also often poses a challenge.

In spite of the obstacles and arduous work, the owners and artists of these small businesses diligently maintain that the contentment they get from witnessing people enjoy their creations makes it all worthwhile. So whether you're someone who's hoping to start their own endeavour someday or simply an admirer of the arts, consider supporting small businesses.

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