

THE REBEL WITHIN YOU

Painting the memory of a movement

#EVENTS

In commemoration of the July Uprising, on 29 July, 2025, The Daily Star hosted an art camp titled “The Rebel Within You,” inviting 11 young artists who lived through the chaos, fear, and fire of 2024’s student-led mass movement. On that day, the walls of The Daily Star Centre pulsed with more than just colour, as they echoed with memory, protest, and the quiet defiance of a generation that refuses to forget. The event was, at its core, a reminder that revolutions do not always end when the crowd disperses. Sometimes, they linger in colour. Read on to hear directly from the artists – what they painted, why they painted it, and what the uprising left behind in their hearts.

Star
LIFE Style



ABDULLAH AL JUNAYED

I am a student of Media Studies and Journalism, but art has always been my second language. And today, I’m not just painting; I’m remembering.

For this exhibition, “The Rebel Within You,” I chose to depict Mir Mahfuzur Rahman Mugdho, one of the young souls martyred during the July Uprising, while offering water to protestors. The act was so simple – handing out water – but in that moment, it became sacred. That bottle in his hand, once ordinary, turned into a national symbol of resilience and sacrifice.

Art does something that words and photos often can’t: it reaches deeper. A photograph might document an event, but a painting, I believe, whispers to the soul. That’s why this event feels different. It’s not just another reflection on July, but an artistic reckoning. A way for us to process what we went through, and share that grief and hope with those who may not have felt it firsthand.



LATA CHAKMA

During the July Uprising, I was trapped between protestors and political mobs. At Beribadh, I found myself alone in a chaos of blocked roads and fear. Someone even reached into my rickshaw to harass me. I kept going because there was no other choice.

“The Rebel Within You” gave me the space to turn that fear into art. Through my painting, I ask: how did we reach this point – and where do we go from here?

AISHAEE CHAKMA

During the July Uprising, I was in Dhaka. And I remember the situation clearly. It was a paralysing uncertainty. It was not only a mass uprising, but also a moment of personal reckoning.

When the call came from The Daily Star about “The Rebel Within You,” I didn’t hesitate. I knew I needed this canvas just as much as it needed me. I didn’t think of it as an opportunity, but saw it as a responsibility.

My painting is not gentle. It’s a societal image of what the country looked like through my eyes: raw, disoriented, desperate, but not broken.



MONG SHONIE RAKHAINE

I’m a Master’s student at Dhaka University. During the July Uprising, I was in Jigatala, where tear gas filled the air and police raids became routine. I remember 18 July, 2024 – sound grenades, panic – the kind of chaos that makes you question whether you will ever make it home.

For “The Rebel Within You,” I painted Riya Gope – a girl who wasn’t protesting, didn’t hold any placard, and yet, became a victim of state violence. That’s what broke me. You didn’t need to chant to be punished. Just being present was enough.

This piece isn’t just a work of art; it’s a memory. It’s for Riya, and for everyone who didn’t choose to join a revolution but became part of it anyway.



AYYAN ANON

I’m in Class 9 and live in Dhaka. Last July, the city just didn’t feel like home. I wasn’t outside protesting, but stuck behind screens, scrolling through chaos – gunshots, arrests, blackout zones – every update made me feel more helpless.

So, when I got the chance to paint for “The Rebel Within You,” it felt like a release. It was my first time working on such a big canvas, and I was nervous. But as my brush moved, I felt like I was finally doing something. Giving shape to everything I had held inside.

My artwork focuses on the unity we saw that month and how people came together despite fear, despite pain. I don’t know if I’ll get another chance like this. But for now, through this painting, I’m part of something bigger.



TANVIR IBN KABIR

I’m a student at the Institute of Fine Arts, University of Chittagong. Last July, I painted walls, made graffiti, and turned every blank surface into a voice.

When The Daily Star reached out about “The Rebel Within You,” I didn’t think twice. I knew exactly what I would paint: Abu Sayeed, standing with arms stretched wide – the image that became a symbol of our defiance.

That pose from July wasn’t just iconic; it felt like a turning point. On my canvas, he (Abu Sayed) stands wrapped in red and green – not just representing protest, but something deeper: the possibility of rebirth. This work isn’t just about memory. It’s about belief. That image, that man, that moment – still speaks.



BADHON AKTHER

When “The Rebel Within You” was announced, I saw it as my chance to finally pour a year’s worth of silence and fear onto canvas.

My artwork is about how we each resisted in our own way; some with slogans, some with silence, and some, like me, through art.

We hoped July would bring real change. Some things shifted, but it is not enough. That frustration still sits in my strokes.

Art lets me preserve what happened. To remind people that this wasn’t just a protest. It was a cry. A memory. A movement. And it must not be forgotten.



SAFIQUL ISLAM SAGOR

I’m a student at the Institute of Fine Arts, University of Chittagong. During the July Uprising, I saw people fall. That kind of trauma doesn’t leave you. It follows you into the studio and onto the canvas.

So, when The Daily Star announced “The Rebel Within You,” it wasn’t just an exhibition. It was a continuation. My painting captures a harsh truth: peaceful protest met with brutal force. Hope, crushed.

Yes, the autocracy fell. But much of the system remains. Justice still feels far away. That’s why I’m here. Not to move on, but to remember.

ARHAM HABIB

This initiative, “The Rebel Within You,” matters. It reminds me of what we lost and regained during the July movement. Before 18 July, that space for free expression was disappearing. The student uprising cracked it open, even if only for a moment.

A year later, that freedom still feels distant. But this exhibition gives us space again – space to reflect, to create, to speak through art. My piece is based on what I witnessed firsthand. And this piece isn’t just art. It’s evidence. It’s what I saw.



OVI RAHMAN

I’m a designer, a filmmaker – and sometimes, a protestor with a paint can. When the July Uprising erupted, I didn’t grab a megaphone. I grabbed colour. I made images on walls, screens, and posters, which spoke when words couldn’t. That’s how I resist. That’s what brought me to “The Rebel Within You.” This isn’t just an art camp – it’s a reminder.

My piece is the crying face of a child. Not a fighter, not a leader, but a witness. The kind of face we often ignore. While adults were bleeding and marching, children were watching. Absorbing. Inheriting trauma. That’s what I wanted to capture – the impact we never measure.

Last July was chaos. We rose, we broke, we burned. And even now, something of it still smoulders. This exhibition preserves the ember. To me, art is rebellion – a frame, a mural, a brushstroke. They’re all protests if done with purpose. Artists aren’t here just to document. We’re here to disturb. To make people feel.

FARHAD HUSEN SUMON

I’m from the Institute of Fine Arts, University of Chittagong.

For “The Rebel Within You,” my artwork is titled “Medha Shohid”. It’s based on what I witnessed during the Quota Reform Movement – when peaceful protestors were shot, and a rickshaw puller carried away a bloodied student. That scene haunted me. I had to paint it.

I stayed on campus until 3 August. Afterwards, my family asked me to return to Jamalpur. But even there, I joined the anti-autocracy movement. Walking in processions, chanting with one voice. The spirit didn’t stop at campus gates.

When I was invited to this exhibition, I felt proud. I changed ideas multiple times before settling on this image. It felt right and honest. This isn’t just art. It’s memory. And now the world will see it.



By Ayman Anika

Photo: Shahrear Kabir Heemel, Sheikh Mehedi Morshed.

***The artworks created by the participating artists during the art camp, “The Rebel Within You,” are now on display at The Daily Star Centre. The exhibition is open to all visitors.

We salute the fearless youth of Bangladesh

Torchbearers of justice, accountability, & democratic reform-whose voices echoed powerfully in the July Uprising of 2024 and continue to inspire the nation’s conscience

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