

“I urge everyone to maximise on leveraging social media” – Naina Hussain, Illustrator and Co-Founder

Growing up in Bangladesh, I’ve only learned to see the world through a lens of colours. The vibrancy of all the movie posters, rickshaws, and truck art around me has pushed me to pursue art as a hobby, and share my work with the world through social media and beyond.

You’re an accomplished illustrator and artist. Can you talk to us about how you got started at bynaina?

My digital art journey is entirely self-taught — I’ve been “experimenting” with Photoshop since the sixth grade when my dad gave me his old Compaq laptop, and I would literally just make make-believe magazines, draw whatever I could with the small keypad that came with the laptop, and would browse through tutorials on Youtube to see what I could do on Photoshop. Back then, I also tried to explore my creativity on Microsoft Publisher. So when I got to pursuing

IB Visual Arts in the 11th/12th grade, I wanted to try out Digital Art because I was heavily inspired by the kind of digital art talent on DeviantArt and decided to dedicate and explore a whole project through the use of digital media. It will be safe to say that that project was a complete fail — I tried drawing with my keypad/mouse, and it just was way too wonky. At that time, I had no clue that people were drawing using tablets (and that tablets were even a thing).

Bynaina was started on a whim. In 2014, right before I headed off to my Sophomore year of college, my siblings gifted me a Wacom tablet since I started showing interest in digital art years before that. After getting the gift, my tablet and I were inseparable. It was summer break, and I would not stop drawing, figuring out how to use the tablet my own way.

When I moved in, and I had moved in a week before classes started, I had some spare time to work on the digital illustrations. Lakmé Fashion Week was going on at that time. I decided to make fashion illustrations digitally and post them on my Instagram right away. I tagged all relevant designers and entities, and within a day, there was an outpour of interest in my work once my work was shared by the designers themselves. I realised that if I put some time and effort into this, I could monetise my work, and that's precisely what I did. However, the money factor was not the biggest motivator in all this, it was the love and support from the Instagram community that kept me wanting to post more and more of my work on Instagram, and for the longest time, I actually did a lot of work for free; worked on several unpaid collaborations, only because I appreciated (and continue to appreciate) the support and the exposure.

You've received many accolades for your unique illustrations and work — what does this mean to you, and how do you define success?

It means the world to me. I'm not sure if I am successful! But if you ask me to define what success means to me, it's the appreciation I receive after I create a piece for anyone. My love language, as I've realized through the years, is to give. So once I receive the words of appreciation and find that I've been able to create "joy" for anyone in any way or form, it fills my heart with gratitude. That, to me, is success.

How have you leveraged social media to accelerate your business and social impact initiatives?

All that bynaina is today is because of social media. It's because of Instagram. I haven't used anything else to spread the word about my work. I've expanded to Etsy where I make my work available for purchase, but if you ask me, it's because of Instagram that most people have found my work on Etsy.

I really believe in the power of social media, the power of using hashtags, and the power of tagging people/brands. It helps you branch out to a world that is beyond your "bubble".

So I urge everyone to maximise leveraging social media because I don't think there is anything more powerful than that in this day and age. Yes, the changes in algorithms are HORRIBLE, and I really do feel that it hinders discoverability and also the motivation. Sometimes the fall in the "number of likes"/"engagements" on posts can be really demotivating, but the key is to look past the numbers and keep on posting. Your work will indeed be discovered.

What is your most significant source of inspiration?

My biggest source of inspiration is the place that I grew up in — Dhaka. Until you live in/visit this part of the world, you won't understand the amount of colours you are surrounded by on a daily basis. It is hard to not be moved by the colours of the rickshaws, the bright & bold movie posters, the murals on the walls, and albeit bad practice, the colourful posters that are posted on walls all over the city every day.

I also try to pick up inspiration from wherever I travel to. India holds a special place in my heart, and after my visit to Jaipur & Agra in 2016, I have been heavily attracted to Mughal architecture. Hence more and more, I try to integrate Mughal influence into my artwork, whether that's through the intricate details that you're able to see on the walls as you're walking through Jaipur, or whether that's through the level of detailing styling and intricate borders you are able to see on Mughal miniature paintings.

You recently founded a public relations firm, Turn Up PR. How did this come about, and can you tell us more about your mission and vision?

Yes I did! This too, was on a whim. I'm not sure if that says something about me! I happened to bump into the right person at the right time. My co-founder, Umaila, had actually reached out to me for a commissioned piece on bynaina, and that's how I met her! She's been working in the advertising and communications field in Bangladesh for eleven years now. Ever since she introduced herself to me, we figured that our career goals/ambitions are quite aligned to bringing change through meaningful work. After I moved to Dhaka in 2019, Umaila and I reconnected again through work, where she pitched the idea of introducing a new way of conducting PR within Bangladesh's PR landscape. I come with a background in advertising — mostly in strategy, media planning, and influencer marketing. I knew that those skills that I have acquired are things I'd like to use in whatever I choose to do next when I move to Dhaka. Hence after a few months of going back and forth with the idea, we decided to take a leap of faith and started Turn Up PR in the middle of a pandemic, unsure of what the future holds for us, but very happily ventured into trying something unconventional in September 2020.

What makes Turn Up different than a traditional PR team?

The PR landscape in Bangladesh currently is very traditional media heavy. We both believe that there is power in collaboration, that with collaboration, people can organically reach the right audience and empower the right people at the right time. Hence we're trying out a more integrated approach where we focus on creating brand partnerships (not necessarily influencer-marketing only), meaningful content and are extremely socially-conscious at our core. We are okay with taking on a smaller number of projects, especially in cases where we don't believe that the brands' ethos may not align with Turn Up's vision.

We represent and connect curators, artists, and businesses with a purpose. We are here to create visibility and credibility for lifestyle, arts, culture, and news/politics. We aim at sharing a PR experience like no other that will spark organic conversations in our social community.

What inspired you to create the Turn Up unfiltered series?

Both Umaila and I think that everyone has a meaningful story to tell. If you try, you can spark conversation wherever and whenever because everyone is "successful" (because remember, you even mentioned, that everyone has their own definition of success). Everyone has their own journey to success that could serve as help and inspiration to someone hearing/reading about the journey. So we are trying to gather a pool of talent, in all senses of the word, through our Turn Up Unfiltered series and want to learn more about everyone's journeys and how they got to where they got, their dreams, their aspirations, and things they are proud of. We all have so much to learn from, and we want to embody that through the Unfiltered series. It is meant to be light-hearted, fun, and an unconventional conversation between the "inspirer" and us.

An Illustrator, Director, and Co-Founder, what's next for you?

No clue, and maybe that's bad, but that's how I like to look at life — I'm just taking it by the day, going with the flow. I'm trying to enjoy the process and learn from my wins and my mistakes through the way. I keep on telling this to people, and I really am not sure when I will act upon it. Still, I want to open a stationery line because I've been an avid stationery collector since I've been a kid. There aren't enough notebooks, planners, and pens, and pencils that one could own. So that's what I hope is next. Still, right now, I'm content about where I'm at, and feel like at this very moment, extra work isn't something that I can afford to take on just because I'm struggling with time management with all the workload. But once everything eases and I can find a balance, I would like to start thinking about my way forward with the stationery line. Not sure when, but hopefully soon!

Any piece of advice for aspiring illustrators and early career PR professionals that look up to you?

I want to pass along two pieces of advice that my parents have instilled in me, and I hope that helps everyone, and not only those on the design or PR path. Firstly, there is no short-cut. Keep on knocking on doors — knock on a hundred doors, ask around for work, and surely one door will open.

Secondly, my mum has always told me to follow my passion. In short, do what you love and love what you do, and success shall follow.

Naina Hussain is a self-taught Digital Illustrator channeling her love for South Asia, its films, music, and culture through her work.

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