

In the KALEIDOSCOPIC *dreamscape* that is Agalam — the collaborative effort between ARTIST Ramesh Mario Nithiyendran and YSG founder Yasmine Ghoniem *represents* a true meeting of likeminded CREATIVE spirits.

By FREYA HERRING Photographed by ANSON SMART



IMAGINARIUM

This page in the living area of this Sydney home, custom joinery by YSG and produced by Maiden Co; custom lamp and bolster cushion by YSG and produced by Rematerialised. *Opposite page* Yasmine Ghoniem and Ramesh Mario Nithiyendran in the living room. *Mangalili Story* (Djarrakpi - Gunyan, Mirriya, Yambirru, Yinapunapu) artwork by Wayilka Maymuru from Sullivan + Strumpf; *The Ghost who Walks Will Never Die* (for Ramesh) sculpture by Nell from Station Gallery; *Obese Nude in Wrestle Pose* sculpture and *Bali Khandra the nude SBBW* from India burnt sugar in Gujarati sculpture by Chris Mason from Arts Project Australia. *Details, last pages.*



These pages in another view of the living area, Thursday **sofa** and **chaise** from Jordan upholstered in Tatsu fabric from Clarence House; Game On **coffee table** by Jacque Meng and Nick Trivett; Liquid Moon **side table** by Louise Olsen for Dinosaur Designs; custom **cushion** by YSG and produced by Rematerialised; Portland Lyrebird Vase with Sydney Cove Medallion **planter** by Glenn Barkley from Sullivan + Strumpf; custom **mirror** by YSG and produced by Maiden Co. framed with handcrafted ceramic tiles by Ramesh Mario Nithiyendran; custom **curtains** by YSG and produced by Petres Curtains; custom **rug** by YSG and produced by Tappeti; Naga Raksha **ceremonial mask** from the Ambalangoda Village.





When lauded contemporary artist Ramesh Mario Nithiyendran asked interior designer Yasmine Ghoniem to transform his home, a 97-square-metre unit in inner city Sydney, she didn't hesitate. "I'm such a huge fan of Ramesh's, and I have a couple of his pieces — actually one of his sculptures I got for my 40th birthday," says Ghoniem, who founded Sydney interiors and architecture studio YSG. "I've always loved his work, so what an amazing brief to receive — it was like, 'Fuck yeah! Let's do this!'"

The result is Agalam, a Tamil word that honours Nithiyendran's birthplace of Sri Lanka, which he and his family left to emigrate to Sydney when he was aged one. With two bedrooms, one bathroom and an open-plan kitchen-living room, it's a familiar floor plan to any Sydneysider. Indeed, its former state was utterly conventional — "White walls, white ceilings, grey concrete floor," he describes — but with Nithiyendran and Ghoniem at the helm, it was never going to stay that way.

"Part of the brief, and part of the reason why I wanted to work with Yas, was based on the fact that I am interested in the residential architecture of Sri Lanka, India and Indonesia," explains Nithiyendran. "Many of my family members who still live in Sri Lanka have these red or burgundy-painted concrete floors, so I have this sentimental view of painted concrete floors. I gave Yas a couple of Geoffrey Bawa images and said, 'Go for your life.' I wanted it to feel like there was a creative reflection of culture there."

The floors, now drenched in burgundy, sing of Nithiyendran's ancestral home. But the warm tonality doesn't stop there. Pinks, oranges and reds abound, transforming this blank slate into a temple of heat and welcome. In its enchanting complexity, it feels like the space of someone who possesses a multifaceted imagination — rich and layered, extraordinary and surprising. This is thanks, largely, to the many objects and artworks (including numerous Nithiyendran ceramic pieces) scattered around: the apartment isn't huge, but everything within it serves an intended purpose, be it aesthetic, functional or conceptual, and many of the inclusions are bespoke.

Its meticulous finish is very much in line with Ghoniem's way of working. Her attention to detail is applaudable — every facet in the rooms she designs is treated with the same generosity. Take, for example, the fibreglass chandelier above the dining table. Situated in the corner of the living space, it makes itself known by jutting out from the beams, glowing in mottled amber like a series of ancient, sawn-off stalactites. Made by YSG and handcrafted by Anomolous, it represents one of Nithiyendran's highlights on the project. "As a living artist, I was excited to work with other living artists and makers, as well as include some vintage pieces," he says. Artworks abound in this apartment, often revealing themselves in unexpected places. "Even the coffee table was an artwork that I bought," he says of Jacquie Meng's 2024 collaborative work with Nick Trivett, *Game On*.

When he talks about living artists, it is clear that he reverently places Ghoniem in this camp. It can be like two full-throttled trains colliding head-on when a pair of creative minds try to collaborate, but not so on Agalam. Here, from the outset, there is deep and very real admiration for each other's contribution. "There's a sense of me respecting the apartment as Yas' creative vision," says Nithiyendran. "Interior design is about reading fabrics, textures, pattern and detailing in the context of the whole, not as discreet objects. I was looking at a lot of things as an artist; as discreet, so it was good to understand that I didn't have the expertise or the nuance to create a beautiful space; it was not in my repertoire or skillset." >

This page in the dining area, custom **dining table** by YSG and produced by Maiden Co; Peacock **chair** (left) and Elephant **chair** by Scotty Bemelen; custom **banquette** and **wall light** by YSG and produced by Maiden Co and Rematerialised; Liquid Vessel 7 earthenware **vessel** by Ramesh Mario Nithiyendran; **ceremonial mask** from the Ambalangoda Village; *An-gujechiya (Fish Trap)* (on ceiling) **art piece** by Maureen Ali from Maningrida Arts and Culture, custom **ceiling light** by YSG and produced by Anomolous; Tuareg **rug** from Little Known Makers. *Opposite page* in the kitchen, **splashback tiles** from Artedomus; Annecy Retro **fridge** from Linarie; **kitchen mixer** from Vola; **joinery knobs** from Lo & Co; Sensible Streaker **dishwasher handle** from Bankston x YSG; Ortoni **kettle** from Bodum; custom **pendant light** by Ramesh Mario Nithiyendran.



This page in the main bedroom, 1930s Swedish Monk chair from CCSS with custom seat pad by Rematerialised; bed cover from In The Sac; custom bolster cushion by YSG and produced by Rematerialised; *Buffalo Story* artwork by Ms. N Yunupinu from Buku Art Centre. *Details, last pages.*



< What fused their vision, though, was their synonymous commitment to creativity. “What was always explicit was a shared value system around what we wanted,” he states. “We wanted beautiful, handmade objects; we wanted to know some of the designers; we wanted it to feel unique and bespoke — the Den Holm lights, for example, were the first lights they ever made.”

The one-of-a-kind trend extends even into the hardware. “The door handles are prototypes for something that Den Holm is working on,” says Ghoniem, on the handles that present as splashes of paint dripping down the door, “so there was a lot of experimentation — and that began with a great deal of trust from Ramesh.”

Despite all of the phantasmagoria of this home (the talismanic chairs! The womb-like bedroom! Pattern! Texture!), when experienced as a whole, Ghoniem and Nithiyendran agree that there is peace therein. “Even though there is so much going on, and so many senses being explored and touched on, it doesn’t feel overwhelming in any way; it feels very comforting,” points out Ghoniem. Living here, says Nithiyendran, is a tonic. “It feels like I’m on one of those oasis holidays, where you are stepping away from the world,” he says. “Most people tell me that there is a sense of time disappearing here; they say, ‘Oh, I didn’t realise it was so late.’”

■ ysg.studio/ramesh-nithiyendran.com