Clay—the material of the earliest handicrafts in human civilization—possesses a latent potential for Sri Lankan-born, Sydney-based sculptor Ramesh Mario Nithiyendran. Although he works across a variety of mediums, including painting and drawing, it is this soft material that best yields his cultish, demonic figures—as well as the occasional grinning, genderfluid god. Binding narratives from Hinduism and Christianity, imagery from indigenous folklore and the neo-spiritualities that shape our consciousness and aid our psychological wellbeing, Nithiyendran forms little (and large) fiendish creatures that, when installed together, form a quasi-religious shrine customized for the contemporary earthly dweller.

Nithiyendran, who earned the 2014 NSW Visual Arts Fellowship (Emerging) for his work in pottery, aims to decentralize still-prevalent rigid perspectives on gender and the aesthetics of spiritualities. In one sculpture, breasts and phallics sprout alongside each other as a tribute to the genderqueer Hindu god Lord Shiva, a constant source of inspiration. For his installation at the 2017 multi-venue exhibition “The National: New Australian Art,” a string of neon lights formed a phallic wall sculpture, referencing petrified art or the hieroglyphs of Ancient Egyptian monuments, in a grotto filled with other objects of idolatry.