The Light Within Freyberg Square
The meaning and celebration of the Festival of Lights, widely known as Diwali, vary across South Asian diasporas living in the West. Through the echoes of migration, Diwali becomes a reminder of what was left behind, of celebration, and of family. At the same time, it serves as a unifying symbol of gathering. No matter where we are or where we go, this time of year carries a sense of reflection and belonging.

How it is celebrated depends on who you ask. In building a sense of identity in the lands we call home, Diwali can be seen in the clothing we choose to wear, the food we eat, and in practising or adapting long-standing family customs. Over generations, the festival takes on more personalised forms, bridging the new with tradition. That is the beauty of Diwali, it is nuanced, and we can bring to it what we need.

The Light Within explores these cues through fine art and documentary photography, Mughal-style painting, and embroidery, drawing on textures, textiles, colours, memories, and nostalgia that come together in a collective experience.

About the artists:

Abhi Chinniah
Abhi Chinniah is a self-taught fine art and documentary photographer whose work explores the shifting cultural identities among migrant communities. Born in Ōtautahi Christchurch to Sri Lankan Tamil Malaysian parents, Abhi grew up on Malaysia's East Coast before settling in Tāmaki Makaurau.

Her ongoing photo essays, Light Skin Dark Skin and Melanin Rising, examine colourism and the portrayal of dark-skinned identities in mainstream media. Her subsequent series, A Migrant's Path, documented the generational impact of migration within the multicultural diasporas in Aotearoa.

Light Skin Dark Skin and A Migrant's Path reside in the permanent archives of the National Library of New Zealand. In late 2024, her collection was presented in a solo exhibition at the New Zealand Portrait Gallery.

Abhi divides her time between Malaysia and New Zealand.

Find Abhi on Instagram: @ramiistudio

Sahana Rahman
Sahana Rahman is a Painter, Textile and Community Artist of Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan Tamil heritage. Born and raised in Te Whanganui-a-Tara, she graduated with a BFA (Hons) degree from Massey University in 2022 and moved to Tāmaki Makaurau in 2023 to pursue her arts practice full-time.

Sahana's work reflects on the complexities of life as a brown queer person, drawing from memory, healing and decolonisation through their unique blending of South Asian style embroidery and Mughal miniature painting. She layers textures with mirrors, brass

charms and an earthy colour palette to reflect her diasporic identity.

In 2022, Sahana founded the “Nokshi Kotha Workshop” in response to her post-pandemic social anxiety. The workshop gently encourages connection through “Nokshi Kantha”, a fading Bengali embroidery tradition that Sahana is hoping to revive. Over 200 participants have contributed to the embroidered mural, creating space for shared conversation, collective healing and joy.

Find Sahana on Instagram: @shannyszn

Deep Khartoum Place – Te Hā o Hine Place
Deep दीप

Deep explores Diwali as both a sacred ritual and a living, evolving tradition within Aotearoa New Zealand. The title has a double meaning, in Hindi meaning light or lamp. The play on words adds to the notion of a layered experience of migration, adaptation, and connection between old and new worlds.

Across four cubes, the installation traces a journey from the cultural origins of Diwali and the devotional ritual of aarti- the offering of light to the divine. The work honours Diwali as a space of reflection and embraces the diverse ways South Asian communities sustain and reimagine Diwali in a new land.

The work speaks to continuity, devotion, and illumination, this visual narrative questions how symbols of culture and faith are carried, reshaped, and sometimes resisted in new contexts. Working collaboratively, Tarika Sabherwal and Jessie Kanji present a site of tension: between reverence and critique, belonging and estrangement, memory and reinvention. Kanji mirrors light as a vessel for memory, connection, and renewal, drawing from the sensory experiences of South Asia. Sabherwal, in turn, resists notions of blind cultural obedience, stretching and rearticulating traditional iconography to suggest alternative possibilities. Her work proposes that an alternative version can exist alongside the original without erasure.

About the artists:

Tarika Sabherwal
Tarika Sabherwal (b.1995, Kolkata) is an artist based in Tāmaki Makaurau who explores ways to narrativise personal relationships and landscapes within a South Asian mythological framework. Sabherwal explores contradictions culturally, conceptually and materially.

She completed her Bachelors of Fine Art at Chelsea College of Arts, UAL in 2018. Recent exhibitions include ; Alag (2025) at Seasons Gallery, *Ragini and her nine wives* (2024) at RM Gallery, *Yahaan* (2024) at Corban Estate Arts Centre, *Kiss Taraf* (2023) at The Art Paper.

Jessie Kanji
Jessie Kanji (b.1997) is a multi-disciplinary artist, researcher and educator. Kanji primarily uses print as a method of thinking, employing colour and pattern to construct a visual language that speaks to the rhythmic intimacy of the handmade. In the amber-like qualities of ink, her work seeks to evoke rasa, a concept from classical Indian aesthetics described by philosopher Bhatta Nayaka as a state of total absorption and aesthetic immersion.

She specialised in print, graduating with a PGDipFA with highest distinction from Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland in 2023. In 2025, she was awarded a fellowship to complete her MFA in printmaking at the Rhode Island School of Design and is currently living in Providence, USA.

Photography of works by Tarika Subherwal courtesy of Samuel Hartnett at Season Aotearoa.