

Ida Bagus Alit

The art world adores eccentric characters. Lurking beneath the exterior of Balinese artist Ida Bagus Alit's wacky persona is, however, a highly practical, compassionate and intelligent man. These traits meld into an effervescent personality that enchants everyone he meets.

Within the Balinese art world Gus Alit, as he is affectionately known, is a popular and unique figure, being a painter, sculptor, photographer, event organizer and art collective leader too. A member of a well known Brahmin high caste family in Denpasar, there is without a doubt an aristocratic air about him, especially when decked out in traditional costume and sporting his suave reading glasses. Yet one is not to be intimidated or coy within his regal presence, Gus Alit is as playful and as friendly as a kitten.

Gus Alit's passion for photography has drawn him along two distinctive paths. He is dedicated to documenting Balinese religious ceremonies around the island, capturing rare events, and the unique traditional costumes that characterize separate villages. Next, he is always experimenting with painting techniques upon printed images on canvas, striving to achieve new aesthetic results with his art photography.

Grinning merrily as he reveals images captured on his iPhone, his ever-ready pocket camera and hand phone, Gus Alit explains one of the "secrets" of his photographic technique. The photos are of young Balinese women clad in traditional dress, glamorous and alluring – the iconic image of Balinese feminine beauty.

"At first they are shy, some even refuse to be photographed," he says referring to his initial meetings with the models. "Yet I always win them over with a joke and my humor quickly sets them at ease." His photos recount the process of their transition from being restrained and rigid, to being relaxed and glowing in front of the camera. The results are wonderful. "It's important to make your models feel comfortable in order to capture and allow their inner beauty to shine."

There are often visitors to Griya Satria Art House, Gus Alit's family's home on Jalan Veteran, opposite the bird market in Denpasar. They may be friends, family, or new acquaintances, locals and foreigners, all curious to see the collection of art on display set in lush tropical gardens while being enhanced by traditional Balinese architecture. Recently more and more young couples, brides and grooms in traditional costumes, call by to be photographed by professional photographers, surrounded by Gus Alit's unusual paintings and sculptures. The consequences are unique momentos that they surely will look back on with pride.

"This is a new era in photography," Gus Alit says with a cheeky smile stretching from ear to ear. "They now go from the Bali museum to Griya Satria Art House for their wedding photos."

Of course Gus Alit jumps into the action and captures the couples in all their glory too. Often he will print the photo onto canvas then paint the background in his flamboyant style. If the subject is a friend he may gift them with the work, however many of his subjects upon seeing his creations, request to buy these unique images directly from him.

"What is important is not to copy," exclaims Gus Alit. "True art must come from the heart."

As the long serving president of B.I.A.S.A (Bali Indonesia Sculptors Association), he is a driving force in the promotion and preservation of traditional woodcarving, and contemporary sculpture in Bali. I question Gus Alit on the value of art collectives in Bali, which he believes are essential to the development of local art.

“As individuals or groups its important to know our strengths and weaknesses. Through this we will learn the ways and methods to move ahead. Learning is life long education,” he states with a wisdom that almost belies his jovial character. “As the head of B.I.A.S.A I take the time to visit each of the members and discuss with them their challenges and I help to provide solutions. B.I.A.S.A is like a big family to me.” It is obvious that Gus Alit is well versed in the concept of leadership with the heart.

His abstract and figurative wood carvings are a fusion of the rich natural rhythms of the timber intertwined with faces and figures. The figures he creates may not always be beautiful, yet he introduces possibilities, all the while being contained within a yin/yang theme. Some of his sculptures he paints in an outrageous manner that none dare to copy.

While contemplating his paintings the observer may wonder what on earth are these creations, are they the musings of a complete oddball? Yet his large compositions, some canvases measuring over 4 meters in width, each have individual themes taken from his culture, for example Tri Hita Kirana, the Balinese philosophy of three fold harmony between man, nature and the gods.

Gus Alit’s paintings are as eccentric as is his personality. A fusion of bright colors, figures and forms, they are both surrealistic and dynamic at once. Adaptations from the Wayang Kulit shadow puppet-theater and traditional masks, his figures and faces have evolved into quirky, other worldly creatures. Akin to galactic landscapes that flow across the canvas his compositions express humor while accentuating that art should be fun to create.

“To be a real artist you have to be free and strive to create your own works under your own responsibility,” Gus Alit states.

His C.V lists all of exhibitions he has participated in over the past 40 years, born in Denpasar 1947, Gus Alit’s works have been displayed in many countries around the world, and his buyers come from every corner of the planet too. In 2006 he participated in an artist in residency program as well as having a solo exhibition at the Vermont Studio Center, USA. A self-taught artist, who regularly travels abroad, his initial childhood inspiration has come from studying his father, Ida Bagus Agung, who was also an artist.

Watching him chiseling away at a work carving, with an eye for detail while being the picture of focus and determination, his wiry hands and arms being powerful, yet sensitive as well. Gus Alit values the virtues and importance of art and culture above himself, is an asset to the island and a proud ambassador of the Balinese arts.



Gusti Nyoman Lempad - Men Brayut - pencil on paper circa 1950's

Ida Bagus Alit - No Doubt - 2014.



Ida Bagus Alit - Rainbow Lady - 2014 mixed media



Ida Bagus Alit - Family in Blue - 2011 acrylic on canvas