

# MADE KAMAR



Profile Photo - Made Kamar

"I remember the story my mother recounted of my very first childhood experience with a kite," says Made Kamar. "The roaring sound and the sight of a large, low flying kite made me scream in terror, and I ran inside my parents house and cried," he revealed, and then grinned, with a sparkle in his eye.

However, by the age of six years Made's passion for kite flying had become a normal way of life for a rural Balinese boy.

Engrossed, I sit and watch Made at work in the bale (traditional shelter) in the family compound. With a razor sharp metal blade he pierces lengths of bamboo, then splits them into accurate sizes for the structural frame of a kite.

"The bamboo is grown in the cold mountain regions of Kintamani and it is renowned for its strength and flexibility," says Made. The rigid and tight grain allows the strands to perfectly peel away.

Made engages his innate sense of intuition to craft the bamboo with acute precision. Exact measurements are made by a simple, yet time-honored custom. All measurements required coincide with dimensions of the body and in this case, with the span of his outstretched hand, from the tip of Made's thumb to the tip of his small finger.

"Some of my earliest childhood memories are of my brothers and I flying kites in the nearby fields, and I affectionately remember the joy we experienced."

Made Kamar was born 29<sup>th</sup> July 1980 in Banjar Penataran, in the village of Negara Batuan, Sukawati. The family tradition of kite making has been passed down from father to son, and Made has matured to become a master craftsman.

Fine string creates tension and bends the bamboo frame into the required proportions. The structure of the kite is basic yet elegant, with perfect symmetrical shape. Today Made and his brothers work together on these frames that they sell to a local business which exports Balinese kites to the international market.

"Nowadays my family is lucky to be supported also by income from my brothers bicycle repair shop at the front of our family house. For years members of my family were employed in the kite making handicraft industry, in 2002 a nearby business employed more than 100 local people. However, the economy now in Europe and America is in bad condition, and the staff has been reduced down to just 25," says Made.

"Flying kites, and especially the sound of the gagangguan (a specially mounted nylon ribbon on the frame of a kite that vibrates in the breeze creating a loud buzzing sound), creates for me a dream-like experience. My mind becomes blank and I am able to transcend my normal daily experience. I float away with the breeze and am relieved from my day to day concerns."

It is generally accepted that kites were invented in China long before written history, however recent evidence suggests kites may have been developed, independently in Indonesia as a device for catching game by very resourceful people.

A part from its religious and ceremonial significance, and as an object for celebrating fertility, birth and destiny, the kite has been a hard-working tool of mankind.

It has been used for signaling over vast distances, fishing, measuring and divining the secrets of the atmosphere. In the west, the kites' major contribution was its role in the development of the airplane. In the fifteenth century kite flying contests were recorded in Indonesia as a historical documentation of cultural life within the archipelago.



On any given day in Ubud, between the months of May to October, the serene afternoon peace may be infiltrated by the buzzing of Balinese kites flying overhead.

“The gagangguan has a specific function to identify different kites. The smaller kites have a shorter cord which vibrates making a high pitch sound and the larger kites have a longer cord that creates a deeper tone, almost like a constant growl,” Made says.

On the morning of Friday 13<sup>th</sup> July, I witness a ceremony for two kites that shall participate in the annual kite festival at Padang Galak near Sanur.

Two large bebean (fish shaped) kites, 9 x 4 meters, adorned in shining nylon parachute cloth are mounted on the back of a tray truck for the journey to the festival site. A local pemangku (Balinese Hindu priest) officiates the ceremony, blessing the kites with prayers, offerings, incense, mantras and holy water. The sacred Hindu texts recounts the story of the boy cow herder Rare Anggon, the incarnation of the Lord Siwa, who invented the game of kite flying.

“This kite festival is not only a competition, yet it is a celebration of the fertility of our land. The Balinese make prayers for abundant harvests and importantly, we also give thanks to the Gods,” states Made.

“Today we are the pride of our Banjar, and the launching of these kites is both a proud and exciting moment. And for me this is especially so. Many of the local youths have worked diligently and lovingly to construct these kites.

I am honored to be the head of this group, to oversee the construction of the kites and all the necessary arrangements and, to lead us into the competition.”

After the ceremony concludes the convoy begins. Balinese males ranging in age from 6 until 30 pile into the truck or are perched on motorbikes, fifty or more, all sporting identical black and white T-shirts and many are carrying brilliant flags identifying their Banjar. The procession carefully transports the kites to Padang Galak and all the preparations during this day are indeed a festive occasion.

The act of kite flying creates a metaphorical pathway between heaven and earth. Our imagination is engaged in the etheric realms, free from the density of earth bound objects, and we may achieve feelings of elation and awe, as well as altered states of consciousness.

“The sky is so beautiful, it is full of life and movement. At times late afternoon clouds resemble characters from the Wayang Kulit (the famous Indonesian shadow puppet theater).”

“When I fly a kite I am able to access my inner child, and this is like a medicine to me. I retreat from all of my responsibilities and the complexities of the physical world. To the Balinese the invisible (niskala) elements are as important as the visible (sekala) ones in this world. The skies are home to my Hindu Gods.”

