

FORT GANSEVOORT



Oototol

Fort Gansevoort, 5 Ninth Avenue, New York, NY

On View: April 23, 2026 – June 19, 2026

New York...Beginning April 23, 2026, Fort Gansevoort will present *Oototol*, the first exhibition in the United States devoted to the late Balinese artist Oototol (c. 1930-2008), featuring a selection of dramatic large-scale figurative ink paintings on view for the first time outside of Asia.

Born under the name Dewa Raram, the artist, later known affectionately as “Oototol,” lived and worked in Pengosekan Village, Bali, Indonesia. He came of age during the Japanese occupation in World War II and the subsequent struggle for independence from Dutch colonial rule in the late 1940s, and later lived through Indonesia’s state violence, from the 1965 genocide to the mass killings of 1998. This was a period of profound upheaval that reshaped Indonesia’s cultural and economic life and left a deep imprint upon the artist and his generation.

With neither formal education nor literacy, Oototol navigated the world with little to no verbal communication, yet he found in art a vital means of expression. His artistic journey flourished after a chance encounter with the visionary Balinese artist Murni (I Gusti Ayu Kadek Murniasih), who was known for her radically personal subject matter. Oototol soon joined Murni and her mentor, renowned Pengosekan painter Mokoh (I Dewa Putu Mokoh), in a small collective of artists who lived and worked communally. Knowledge is limited about Oototol’s personal biography outside of his association with this close-knit group and almost none of Oototol’s paintings are titled nor dated.

While many of his contemporaries in Pengosekan Village adopted a unified painting style depicting local flora and fauna in soft pastel tones for the growing tourist economy, Oototol charted a markedly different path. He worked in a monochromatic palette—using black Chinese ink, bamboo pens and brushes—to create paintings that merged elements of traditional Balinese storytelling with contemporary subject matter to highly original and idiosyncratic effect. While sometimes alluding to scenes and characters from the Hindu epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, Oototol’s subject matter more often focuses on scenes of quotidian life, drawing on political iconography and psychological themes, mingling them with suggestions of queerness.

His defining body of work depicts archetypal authority figures dressed in white military-style tunics and caps, a motif purportedly influenced by Oototol’s fascination with Indonesia’s first president, Sukarno, and his iconic attire. (Oototol was also known to wear a *peci* cap and sunglasses while he worked, subtle nods to Sukarno’s distinctive sartorial style and its private associations to the artist.) Though not overtly

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ideological, these images reflect the broader spirit of liberation and cultural transformation, as well as subtly encode trauma, that accompanied Indonesia's postcolonial era. Oototol's work stands as a singular fusion of tradition, personal vision, and historical consciousness, articulated through a visual language uniquely his own.

At Fort Gansevoort, *Oototol* showcases the striking graphic power of Oototol's monochrome compositions—works that draw simultaneously on Balinese cultural heritage and Western pictorial conventions.

Playfulness, eroticism, and aggression come together in his flattened scenes without inhibition or the confines of explication. *Untitled* (After Akrotiri Boxer Fresco), c. 2006, depicts two slender, long-haired nude male figures in a combative vignette. This painting explicitly references the celebrated Minoan Bronze Age composition known as the Akrotiri Boxer Fresco, which was rediscovered in 1967 in Thera, Greece, and which Oototol undoubtedly encountered through a reproduction in an art book or magazine. Oototol was known to look closely at illustrated art publications, drawing inspiration from a range of cultures, movements and genres accessed in their pages. In this particular work, he closely mimics the ancient fresco's composition—its paired figures locked in confrontation—while making it his own by adding soldier caps to the boxers' heads and transforming the original fresco's cracked surface pattern into a decorative field reminiscent of Balinese *aun-aun* motifs. One boxer covers the other's face with an open palm in a gesture that reads not only as self-defense but as silencing—a bold but poignant echo of the artist's own quiet existence. The atmospheric squiggles that fill the background of this painting evoke *aun-aun* patterns traditionally used to animate negative space in Balinese painting. Representing haze or dust particles in the air, these forms align with the Balinese philosophical concept that space is never empty but exists along a spectrum between the busy (*ramé*) and the quiet (*sepi*). By intuitively blending various pictorial and cultural references with imagery from his own imagination, Oototol formed a highly personal visual idiom that comes to life across all the works on view in the exhibition.

Despite the lack of existing personal testimony about Oototol's art, the queering of his imagery resonates powerfully today, challenging normative expectations and creating space for more expansive interpretations of both his work and that of his generation. The archetypal uniformed soldiers in the work *Untitled* (Kissing figures), c. 2006, appear tucked into dense foliage, creating an interplay of concealing and reveling across a pair of intimate scenes. In one vignette, soldiers kiss as another watches; in the second, a soldier plucks a flower as a likely gift for his companion. These images read as tender yet chaste depictions of homoerotic desire, tinged with longing and voyeurism. Created within a society where queer identities often remained unlabeled and discreet, this painting invites conjecture while resisting definitive conclusions.

In the monumental composition *Untitled* (Surfing figures), c. 2004, Oototol humorously positions fully uniformed soldiers on surfboards, poised mid-gesture as if about to give one another triumphant high-fives. The scene references one of Bali's most popular leisure activities and a cornerstone of its tourism economy while the rigidity of the surfers' poses echoes the stylized stance of traditional *wayang kulit* shadow puppets. The absence of linear perspective and illusionistic depth further underscores the aesthetic of traditional shadow theatre. Stylistic affinities with European modernism are also evident in the simplified geometric forms and bold outlines. His uncanny imagery unfolds as part romanticized

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fairytale and part vision of quotidian life, collapsing fantasy and everyday experience into a single, theatrically staged tableau—resonant, charming but ultimately enigmatic scenes that both hew to and cross boundaries of specific cultural context.

Though Oototol's work was not presented at museums or galleries during his lifetime, his art has been exhibited in recent years in Indonesia, Singapore, China, Japan, and the United Kingdom. In 2026 and in addition to Fort Gansevoort's first US exhibition devoted to the artist, his work was shown recently at Misako & Rosen and Fig in Japan. In 2025, Oototol's work was exhibited at Nottingham Contemporary in the United Kingdom, Cc Art Foundation in Shanghai, China, and at Jakarta International Expo in Jakarta, Indonesia. In 2024 his work was exhibited at ROH Projects in Jakarta, Indonesia, and in 2023 at Nonfrasa in Jakarta, Indonesia.

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Caption and courtesy information:

Oototol

Untitled (Kissing Figures), c. 2006

Chinese ink on canvas

67 x 43.5 in

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