

Karakuri Exhibition Hall

The mechanical dolls (*zashiki karakuri ningyo*) on display in the Karakuri Exhibition Hall are early forms of robots and have been used to entertain people for hundreds of years. They were made from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries and are constructed almost entirely of wood. An intricate system of cogwheels, springs, rods, and pulleys allows them to perform lifelike movements such as dancing, doing a handstand, donning a mask, swinging a hammer, and opening a fan.

Multiple types of *karakuri ningyo* are on display. The larger “festival float dolls” (*dashi karakuri*) feature in the Inuyama Festival, which dates back to 1635 and is still held every year during the first weekend in April. The dolls are part of reenactments of traditional myths and legends that play out on the upper levels of three-story floats as they are paraded through the streets of Inuyama. It takes a team of seven to eight people located on the second story to operate the dolls.

The smaller “sitting room mechanical dolls” (*zashiki karakuri*) were expensive toys collected by the elite. The most well-known was a doll that served tea. After a cup of tea was placed on its tray, the doll moved forward and bowed its head. It stopped when the cup was removed. The doll’s mechanics relied on a wound spring made of whale whiskers.

Performances and live commentaries showcasing the dolls are held every Saturday and Sunday at the Karakuri Exhibition Hall.