

***Nebutashi* Artisans**

Nebutashi (Nebuta artisans) are the master craftspeople who create the Nebuta floats. Their work usually begins directly after the end of one year's festival, when they start developing concepts for the next year's Nebuta. The *nebutashi* come up with sketches during early winter, and begin crafting the heads, arms, and other parts of the figures from January. In May, they relocate their work to special tents where the Nebuta floats are assembled.

Around 14 *nebutashi* work on the floats; the majority of them hold other jobs in addition to working on the Nebuta part-time. The *nebutashi* are not assigned exclusively to one float, as some of them work on multiple floats at the same time. Each float has its own distinct theme, shape and artistic techniques used. While the high level of skill involved means that Nebuta-making is now practiced only by a select few artisans, this was not always the case. The floats were originally crafted by skillful Nebuta-loving amateurs from neighborhood associations and other sponsors of the festival. Nowadays, in order to qualify as a *nebutashi*, one must undergo training and be skilled in sculpting, calligraphy, and painting. But this is not to say that Nebuta construction is a solo effort: the *nebutashi* work together with a large number of assistants, including electricians.