

Building a Nebuta

Every year the Nebuta floats are made from scratch, this process often starting the moment the previous festival ends. The executive committees (a company, school, industry union, or municipal government) work with a *nebutashi* (Nebuta artisan) on a design for the Nebuta float. The designs depict a historical story or folktale in the distinct Nebuta style, all bright colors and angry faces with thick eyebrows. The *nebutashi* first sketches out and colors the design. Once the artisan and executive committee agree on the design, the *nebutashi* begins to construct the float.

Using their design as a guideline, the Nebuta artisans and their helpers build the frame from scratch using wire. They craft parts of the large figures, including their heads, hands, and legs, continuing this work until they are ready to move to Rasse Land, a cluster of large tented huts where the Nebuta floats are constructed from mid-May onward. Here the artisans build the figures, using wooden beams as a skeleton and wire to achieve the desired shape, and attach the head and other previously prepared parts. Lightbulbs are added to the interior frame to light up the float at night. After that, the exterior of the figure gets assembled. *Washi* paper is pasted over the wire and cut into shape, covering the entire float. Once the paper is put on the figure, the craftspeople draw an outline using brushes and calligraphy ink (*sumi*). Before beginning the coloring process, paraffin is used for borders to prevent the colors from mixing; this also helps make the Nebuta float appear brighter when lit up. Dyes and watercolor pigments are used for coloring, which is done with brushes and spray guns.

Finally, the finished figure is lifted onto a decorated and wheeled platform; this step requires about 50 people to complete and is the climax of the year-long process of building a Nebuta float.