

## Nebuta Museum Wa Rasse

Opened in January 2011, Wa Rasse is a two-floor, family-friendly museum dedicated to the history and art of the Nebuta Festival. The museum's name comes from *wa*, short for *warai* (laughter), and *rassera*, the customary festival chant. Only one minute on foot from Aomori Station, Wa Rasse provides in-depth knowledge and insider information for anyone wanting to learn more about the big event. It is open year-round.

The large black and red building is set against the backdrop of Aomori Bay. Inside, the museum is dark and the traditional *hayashi* music of drums, flutes, and cymbals plays in the background, recreating the evening atmosphere of the Nebuta Festival. Bright displays are used to explain the history of the festival and give a behind-the-scenes look at the design and construction of the Nebuta floats.

After the festival ends, four award-winning floats are displayed in the Nebuta Hall with a description of the construction and story behind each float. Visitors can observe all the details that go into their creation, from the wooden and wire frames to the detailed painting that pulls everything together.

Preliminary sketches made by the *nebutashi* (Nebuta artisan) are also on display. This type of sketch—a simple image rather than a detailed blueprint—is the guide for the Nebuta float's year-long construction process and is the key to the artistic design of the float, a real test of the artisan's imagination. Visitors can feel the expressive energy of the float in the two-dimensional drawing, even before its construction.

Visitors have the opportunity to touch the floats and try their hand at constructing pieces of sample floats using materials such as *washi* paper. There are also classes and workshops that give a behind-the-scenes look at the festival. Visitors can learn how to play traditional festival music with the *taiko* drum, bamboo flute, and hand cymbals, or make crafts such as paper goldfish or the heads of miniature Nebuta figures.