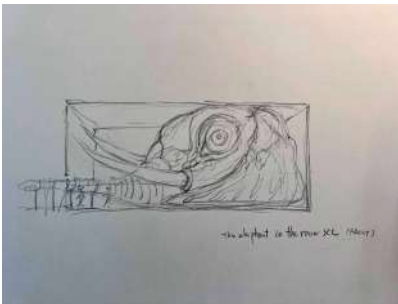


Exhibition Highlights

Symbol of the Exhibition: Gigantic Elephant Balloons Festooning the Gallery

The heart of the exhibition is Tsubaki Noboru's latest work *the Elephant in the Room*, inspired by the largest mammal on earth today. The gallery will play host to a parent-child pair of giant balloon-based works, modeled on the heads of a large bull elephant with open eyes, and a smaller, more androgynous beast, with eyes closed.

Together these evoke the idiom "the elephant in the room" meaning something that everyone has noticed, but no one mentions. *the Elephant in the Room* takes a fresh look at the everyday acts and thoughts that accompany our tendency to turn a blind eye to the true state of things, and explores what it means to achieve freedom within this.



Drawing from *the Elephant in the Room XL*
2025 © Tsubaki Noboru



Maquette of *the Elephant in the Room XL*
2025 © Tsubaki Noboru

Wellspring of the Artist's Thinking:

Tsubaki's Mind in Three Dimensions as Improvised Production Studio

The exhibition will include a space for improvised onsite production by the artist, who believes that "the vital thing is not to evolve, but to simply keep changing." The studio will take shape over the fortnight or so prior to exhibition opening, during which the artist will actually reside in the gallery. This space mingling Tsubaki's memories of his student days, and a homage to Van Gogh's *Le Café de nuit* (Café Terrace at Night) (1888) may be viewed as a kind of testing ground; a physical manifestation of Tsubaki's mind.

The scattering of maquettes and drawings, and notes containing snippets of ideas, make this the most dynamic space in the exhibition; a place to witness the ceaselessly changing production process itself.

Genesis of an Idea:

Tracing the Birth of *aTTA* in Downtown Towada

The giant crimson-red robotic ant *aTTA* has graced the grounds of the Towada Art Center since its opening in 2008. To commemorate the addition of drawings for *aTTA* to the TAC collection in 2024, a special exhibition tracing the story behind the work will be staged in two shops in downtown Towada.

These precious drawings, on display for the first time since acquisition, and Tsubaki's intricate maquettes, will show how Tsubaki made the work, from the emergence of its concept to the process of its fabrication, in a circuit-style exhibition unique to Towada, allowing visitors to track the origins of the artist's creative imaginings as they walk through the art center and town.



aTTA
2008, Towada Art Center
Photo by Oyamada Kuniya

Contact Us

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Statement by Tsubaki Noboru

The knotty question of whether free will can exist in the face of determinism; and the theory that time does not exist and change is the only constant, are also linked to the question of why artists keep making works that unfold chronologically. It seems funny that artists behave as if they were free, yet in their creation continue to be haunted by the most basic evolutionary theory. An idea is born, a maquette is born, a completed work is born. On reflection, if this flow is unconsciously leading us into the realm of mediocrity, then surely the realm of art must also be rather boring.

One afternoon while pondering this, a whisper descended from the elephant, largest land mammal on the planet, and a mahout of the Mughal Empire. Wouldn't it be amazing to have two elephant heads lying around in that space...Then the curator of this exhibition, Nagao-san, informed me that neuroscientist Mogi Kenichiro employed the phrase "the elephant in the room" in his text about my work at a previous exhibition in Taiwan.* The whole thing struck me as a brilliant coincidence (or rather, I had just forgotten...) also because a genetic data company had found in my ancestry people who had moved to Siberia to hunt mammoths.

I the mahout shall lead *aTTA* on parade. It is great to finally be back here again.

**Slaying Monsters*, Kuandu Biennale (Taiwan, 2016)

Tsubaki Noboru



© Tsubaki Noboru

Director of ARTOTHÈQUE. Professor, Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Kyoto University of the Arts. Born 1953 in Kyoto, Japan. Tsubaki received his MFA from Kyoto City University of Arts. He shot to international acclaim with his large-scale sculpture *FRESH GASOLINE* at "Against Nature: Japanese Art in the Eighties" (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, et al., 1989–91). His works were also featured in Aperto '93 at the 45th Venice Biennale (Italy, 1993), and he presented *Insect World* at Yokohama Triennale 2001 (Kanagawa, Japan). Among his solo exhibitions are "Noboru Tsubaki" (Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, US, 1992), "UN Boy" (Art Tower Mito, Ibaraki, Japan, 2003), "Noboru Tsubaki: 2004–2009 Gold Black White" (The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, 2009), and "Prehistoric PH" (Kirishima Open-Air Museum, Kagoshima, Japan, 2012). Tsubaki served as artistic director of the "Sakate Port and Hishio no Sato Project" for Setouchi Triennale 2013 (Kagawa, Japan), Aomori Triennale 2017, and Artists' Fair Kyoto (2018–).

<https://www.metapolice.net/>

aTTA is on display outdoors as part of the permanent collection of the Towada Art Center.

Public Programs

*Please note that additional programs will be scheduled during the exhibition period. Further details will be announced on our website at a later date.

Artist Talk

Date & Time 14:00–14:40 Saturday, June 6, 2026

Location Towada Art Center Collaborative Space / Admission: Free with exhibition ticket

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About the Exhibition

Title	<i>Tsubaki Noboru: FREEDOM—Living with "the Elephant in the Room"</i>
Dates	Saturday, June 6 – Sunday, November 8, 2026
Hours	9:00–17:00 (Last admission 30 minutes before closing)
Closed	Mondays (or the following day if Monday falls on a national holiday). Open on August 3 and August 10.
Location	Towada Art Center
Admission	Admission: 1,800 yen Groups of 20 or more: 1,600 yen Under 18: Free
Organized by	Towada Art Center
Endorsed by	Asahi Broadcasting Aomori Co., Ltd., Aomori Television Broadcasting Co., Ltd., Aomori Broadcasting Cooperation, FM Aomori, The Daily-Tohoku Shimbun Inc., The To-o Nippo Press & Towada City Board of Education
Curation	Nagao Eriko

Towada Art Center

The Towada Art Center opened in 2008 as the first contemporary art center in Japan's Tohoku region. The art center's permanent exhibition comprises 38 works by world-class artists, including Kusama Yayoi, Nara Yoshitomo, Shiota Chiharu, and Ron Mueck. The collection expands beyond the art center to the Art Square, a park-like area where children and adults alike can stroll, relax, and interact with the outdoor artwork.

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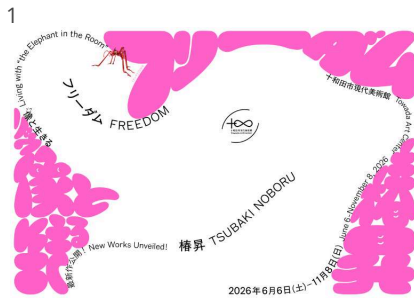
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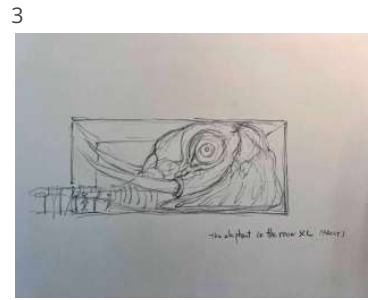
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Main visual for *Tsubaki Noboru: FREEDOM—Living with "the Elephant in the Room"*
Design: Miyama Yu



aTTA
2008, Towada Art Center
Photo by Oyamada Kuniya



Drawing from the Elephant in the Room XL
2025 © Tsubaki Noboru



Maquette of the Elephant in the Room XL
2025 © Tsubaki Noboru



metapolice
1997 © Tsubaki Noboru



mammalian
2012 Photo by Kenryo Gu



Portrait © Tsubaki Noboru



Towada Art Center Exterior

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