

Tamura Satoru

Don't Ask Why the Crocodiles Spin

Artist | Tamura Satoru
Exhibition Title | *Don't Ask Why the Crocodiles Spin*
Dates | August 27 (Sat.) – September 24 (Sat.), 2022
Location | MAKI Gallery / Omotesando, Tokyo



MAKI Gallery and TEZUKAYAMA GALLERY are pleased to jointly announce *Don't Ask Why the Crocodiles Spin*, a solo show by Tochigi-based artist Tamura Satoru. The presentation focuses on Tamura's spinning crocodiles—a key part of his practice for almost 30 years—and follows his well-received solo exhibition at The National Art Center, Tokyo (Roppongi) in June 2022. A total of over 1,000 rotating crocodiles will fill both spaces in Omotesando, Tokyo and Minami-Horie, Osaka, creating an explosion of color and motion that envelops the viewer with its surreal dynamism.

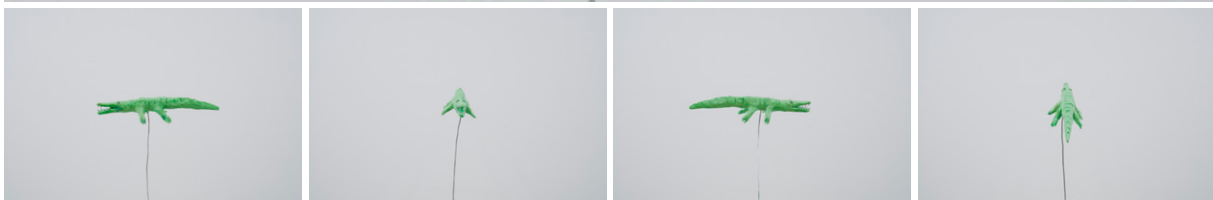
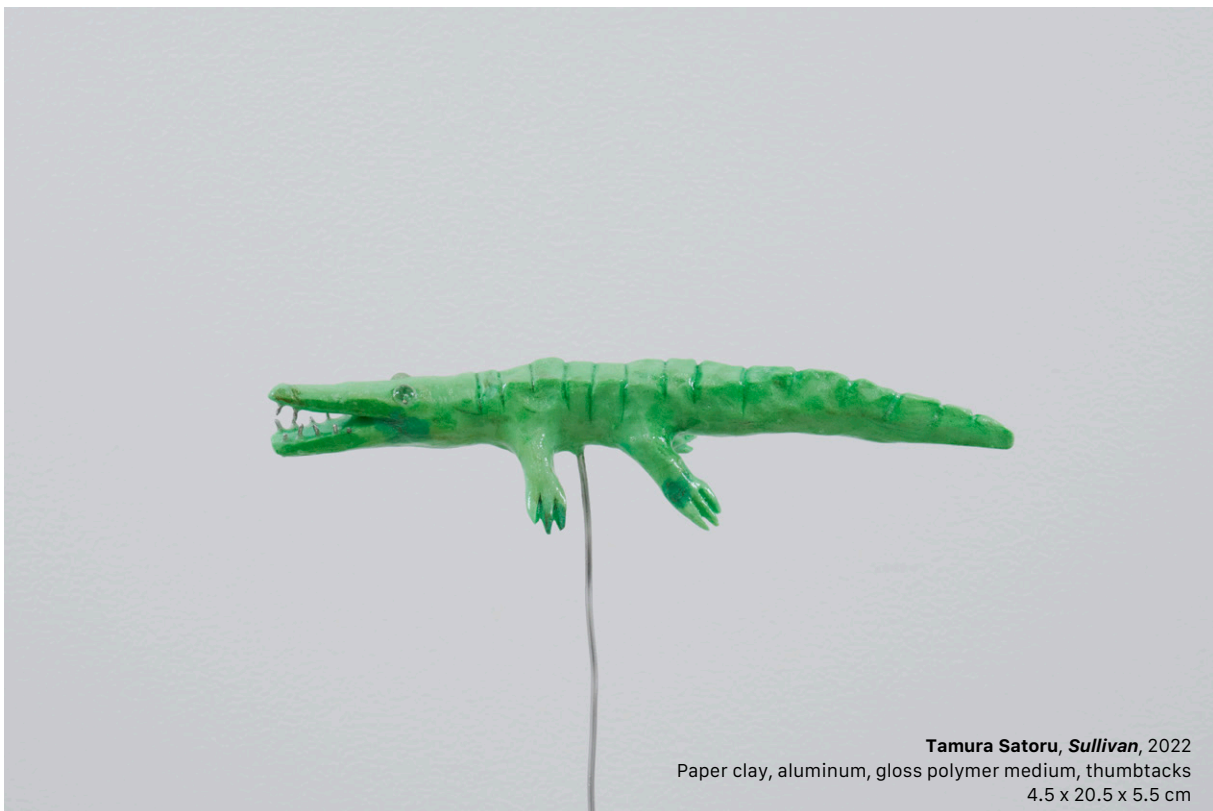
The spinning crocodile was first conceived in the fall of 1994, when Tamura was still a student at the University of Tsukuba. He was struggling with an assignment given by his professor—to create an artwork that uses electricity. At the time, Tamura had never made an electric or kinetic work before. Stumped, he decided to make whatever first popped into his head the next morning, which ended up being “spinning crocodiles.” Tamura stuck to his word and hand-sculpted a green, 4.5-meter-long crocodile mounted on a rotating pedestal. The artist was enthralled by the ridiculousness of the resulting work and went on to pursue similarly absurdist concepts after graduation. Electricity and mechanics have since become integral parts of Tamura's practice, and the spinning crocodiles have continued to evolve alongside the artist's career.

In 2022, Tamura took on the extraordinary task of building 1,000 crocodile devices to fill a massive exhibition space in The National Art Center, Tokyo. He meticulously hand-crafted every single one out of clay, streamlining the process as he went along. The artist further emphasized the crocodiles' individuality by giving them unique names and adjusting their rotational speeds to produce slight variations. Perhaps that is why they possess a distinct warmth and personality, despite their motorized movements.

In Japan, crocodiles do not exist in the wild—common conception frames them as dangerous, exotic animals rarely seen outside captivity. Tamura exaggerates this alienness by making drastic changes in color and scale—the crocodiles can be cobalt blue, bright orange, or even stark white, and range anywhere from 20 centimeters to 12 meters long. There is a sort of childlike joy in seeing these terrifying creatures transformed into harmless, kitschy characters. Curiously, the further Tamura's crocodiles stray from reality, the more endearing and approachable they become.

Tamura's kinetic sculptures utilize electricity and industrial materials, yet they do not serve any productive means. There is an ironic anti-utilitarianism that underlies his practice, subtly poking fun at contemporary society's obsession with productivity and efficiency. In fact, his works do not even present a clear artistic purpose, thus subverting the viewer's expectations of what art should "do" or "mean." As indicated by the exhibition's title, Tamura refuses to define specific intentions behind his works. Instead, he encourages the viewer interact with them instinctively and pay attention to their own honest reactions.

We welcome you to enter Tamura's whimsical world, where the natural and mechanical collide to form a nonsensical yet captivating phenomenon.



Tamura Satoru

Born in Tochigi Prefecture in 1972, Tamura Satoru began his career as an artist after graduating from the University of Tsukuba in 1995. His works utilize electricity, essential to modern civilization and a key part of the social infrastructure. At times, electricity powers a rotating crocodile, at others, it transforms into a measuring device that quantifies beauty, and at still others, it lights a lamp through the placement of positive and negative electrodes within a hair's breadth of each other. His works, large-scale "devices" that are reminiscent of amusement parks, overflow with an irony that might make us want to murmur "So what?" in spite of ourselves. They embody and express what the artist elucidates as his "desire to be free from the meanings, settings and functions that materials and forms possess."

Electricity has become so deeply embedded in our daily lives and in industry that we now see it as a given. Should a blackout occur, we finally recognize how reliant we have become on electricity. Out of this most essential of resources to modern society, with touches of cynical humor, the artist creates artworks that are completely useless and unproductive as objects. His works are the epitome of fine art, which admits of no other purpose except its being viewed. Through this, they present a warning to a society in which utility is the sole priority.

Tamura's solo exhibitions include *Spinning Crocodiles, Tamura Satoru*, The National Art Center, Tokyo (2022); *TOKYO Machine*, GINZA ATRIUM, GINZA TSUTAYA BOOKS (Tokyo, 2021); *Domain of Art 22 Satoru Tamura Exhibition: Wall to Wall (Plaza North 10th Anniversary Exhibition)*, Plaza North, North Gallery (Saitama, 2019); *Point of Contact #6*, LAGE EGAL RAUM FÜR AKTUELLE KUNST (Berlin, 2015); and *Wonderland in Mid-Summer*, Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts (Tochigi, 2014).

He has participated in numerous group exhibitions in Japan and overseas, including *The Method of Breathing World*, Kawamura Memorial DIC Museum of Art (Chiba, 2005) / Sakura City Museum of Art (Chiba, 2005); *I am a Curator*, Chisenhale Gallery (London, 2003); *First Steps: Emerging Artists from Japan*, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center (New York, 2003); and *NEO-TOKYO - Japanese Art Now*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (Sydney, 2001). Tamura has also received many awards including the International Light Art Award: First Prize (2017), The 12th Taro Okamoto Award for Contemporary Art Special Prize (2009), Philip Morris K.K. Art Award 2002: The First Move P.S.1 Art Award Special Prize (2002), and KIRIN CONTEMPORARY AWARD Encouragement Prize (1999).



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