

## The Human

I am greeted by a group of bronze sculptures that Ólöf Nordal has spread around her studio space. The sculptures vary in size, but all have the shape of a figure. At first glance, these figures look similar, as they are all the same type of bronze sculpture, but upon a closer look, each one has its own characteristics, which appear when they are scrutinised. The figures seem to have a personality, like the one in the middle of the group who tilts their head and looks the visitor in the eye, like they are interested in having a conversation. What do you want? I think. Who are you and what are you trying to tell me? The friendly face not only demands attention but also evokes empathy.

My eyes wander around the group and stop at another figure who sits all puffed up in a seat that lifts them off the floor. This one is trying to tell me they don't need me, I think as my eyes stray towards a small figure that seems to shrink in its helplessness. The figures resemble humans, but they don't look like people. They have no hands, just truncated wings and faces with beaks. Where do these birdmen come from and how did they end up here? I think. These are obviously not the kind of birds we know best. There is no eider or golden plover, neither resident birds nor migratory. These must be vagrants from a species that sometimes strays here, stays for a short while and either continues on to their own habitat or wastes away and dies in the harsh and alien climate. Some try to make a living in the new place and sometimes they succeed.

Our ideas about what it means to be a human being are deep-rooted in Western philosophy that assumes that some people are more human than others. It presumes that humanity belongs to a select group of the species called Man. The idea of Man and humanity rests on the power to define which individuals within the species can claim humanity as their trait. The opposite of humanity is savagery, which has not only been attributed to wild animals but also to all people who fall outside the claim to humanity.

This understanding of humanity is based on opposite pairs which create a certain hierarchy that throughout history has led to oppression and finally exclusion. This kind of thinking has deep roots and is based on the idea that a human being cannot be an animal if they have humanity, but if they lack

certain characteristics which are considered the manifestation of humanity, the possibility arises for people to be defined as animals. The clearest example of this are human beings who consider themselves human but sell other human beings into slavery. This happens when a certain group believes it can rule over another, based on wealth, societal status, nationality or whatever renders the other human defenseless. Post-humanist philosophy has attempted to deconstruct this kind of thinking by highlighting that the human is a manifold concept. That you can be human, regardless of gender, class, race, ethnicity, religion or physical and mental attributes. That humanity does not solely belong to the rich and powerful, but to all people. You could even go further and doubt that the humanity, in its entirety, has any more rights than other species in the biosphere.

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