

‘New Humans’ and the Strange End of Contemporary Art as We Know It

The New Museum reopens with a show that's a disguised manifesto for a post-contemporary museum.



Precious Okoyomon, *When the Lambs Rise Up Against the Bird of Prey* (2024).

by Ben Davis • Mar 19, 2026 • [Share This Article](#)

My takeaway from the opening of “New Humans: Memories of the Future” is that the project of “contemporary art” may be ending.

Sorry, that’s a big statement for a piece that’s just meant to be a first reaction to this giant exhibition, which is designed to show off the newly expanded New Museum. I have to spend more time there, but I enjoyed the new NuMu’s spiffy addition from the firm OMA.

Well, what did I expect? The pitch for “New Humans” was that it would confront us with “what it means to be human in the face of sweeping technological changes.” That might suggest a zeitgeist-chasing show of art trying to capture tech anxiety about the topics of the day: chatbots and brainrot, AR glasses and Polymarket.

There are the barest traces of that sort of subject matter here, and it feels as if the show has hit them with a petrification ray. I’m thinking of Judith Hopf’s statue *Phone User 5* (2021–22), a blobby concrete selfie-taker, and Simon Denny’s all-white sculpture based on an idea for an alarming cage-like workstation for warehouse workers that Amazon patented. (Mercifully, the mega-corp abandoned the idea.)



Judith Hopf, *Phone Use 5* (2021-22). Photo by Ben Davis.