

CENTRAL BOOKING

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A guide to the art of the book... and beyond



EXHIBITION CATALOG COMMON DESCENT

Mary Ting *Artist Project*

Stevie Ronnie, *Book Apothecary*

Melissa Potter, *Gender Assignment*

Amber Heaton, *Step Etching Time*

Lynn Sures

Variations

It was geology that got me interested in evolution. I had been curious about geology for about five years in the mid-90s. One day I found myself pondering one of those non-sequiturs that fires when your mind is clear and open. Fact: the Rocky Mountains were still pushing up new land. Thought: that new land had never witnessed human activity nor been exposed to Humankind...but as fossils, there were humans elsewhere hidden inside the earth. It struck me that I needed to know about those humans and the substrates in which they were discovered.

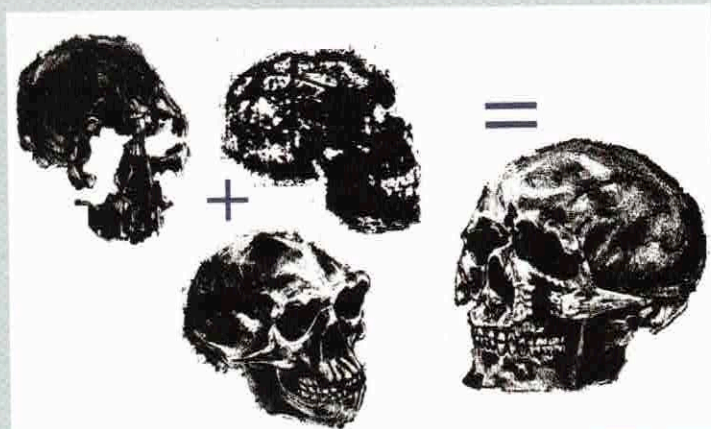
I took out some library books on human evolution with black and white photographs, providing me with models for a suite of drawn studies of early hominids and a way to learn identification and provenance. At some point I became so absorbed in the human origins information that I was no longer even thinking about the earth. I finished drawing from the last of the hominid photographs in the books, with no computer yet for research, but I craved more.

And then my thoughts went to the National Museum of Natural History right here where I was living in Washington, DC! I brought my sketchbook with me to visit and drew the three skulls in the museum installations, though as reference they were better than the book photographs, but too far away from me to see them as I wanted. Thus forced to ask at the information desk if there were any others closer to eye level, it was suggested that I contact the Office of Human Origins upstairs. A couple of phone calls later, there I was upstairs speaking with Jenny Clark, an illustrator with the Office, who would arrange permission with her boss for me to draw the skulls in their collection. I found it amazing.



Lynn Sures, *VARIATIONS on the Dialectic between Mungus and Pithecanthropus erectus*, 2005, Woodcuts, pulp painted paper, paper, letterpress printed text, 7.5 x 10.5 x .5 inches Closed; 60 x 10.5 inches Open

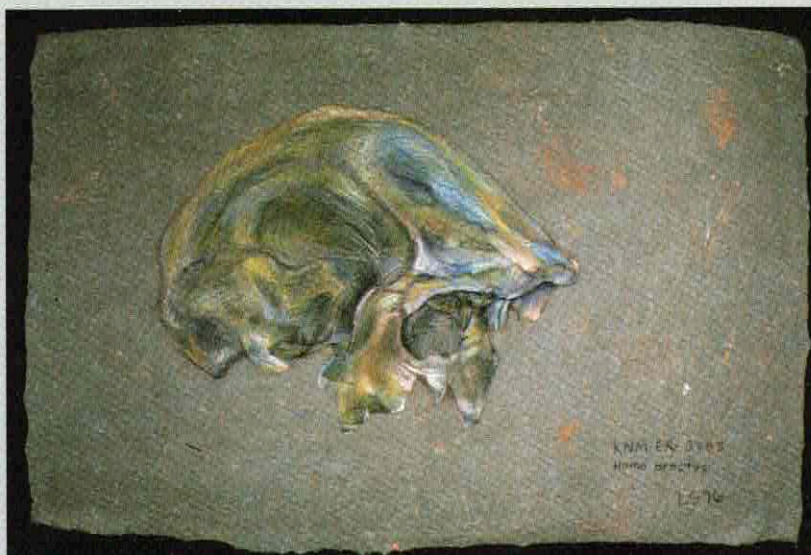
I started on a plan of weekly studies at the Office and met Rick Potts, the Director of the Human Origins Program, when he returned to Washington some weeks later. Rick, too, I found welcoming as I continued to frequent my new favorite place in DC. I chose a skull cast to work from at "my" desk, set up an array of colored pencils as well as my own handmade paper and completely fixated on getting to know the individual the skull represented. Rick knew all the hominids' stories and he, Jenny and the post-docs working in the Office shared their field work and their lives as paleoanthropologists with me. They invited me to the Smithsonian seminars where scientists in related fields informed each other about recent discoveries. Through the seminars and then social events, as friendships with these scientists developed, I kept learning. Eventually I had drawn all the individuals represented in the Human Origins collection so then contacted Allison Brooks of George Washington University, who permitted me to visit her office and draw the skulls she had that could not be found in the NMNH collection.



Lynn Sures, "Zhoukoudien" 1996, color pencil on artist's handmade flax paper, 12 x 18 inches

This was a heady time for me; I had fallen in love with human evolution. I began making paper pulp paintings on a large scale. With them, I documented the phases of human evolution, grouping hominid skulls that emerged with their own secrets from the protective matrices where they had hidden for so long. I painted land and stories that accompanied the hominids—anything that could bring to life the excitement I felt about them. I happened to be listening to music on the car radio in 1997 to a piece that caught my attention, identified by the announcer as “Pithecanthropus erectus” by Charles Mingus. I mentioned my discovery to Rick Potts, and with my laboratory technician Terry Chouinard, we decided to collaborate on a broadside about the hominid, *P. erectus* and the musical piece.

It was not until 1999, though, that the project moved forward. Terry, now in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, suggested that the broadside could become an artist’s book. Rick and I met several times in late 2000-2001 and discussed the conditions of the discovery of *P. erectus*. Rick gave me photographs of the Trinil River where the hominid was found, along with some illustrators’ learned interpretations of the hominid’s appearance.



Lynn Sures, “*Homo erectus*: KNM-ER 3883,” 1996, color pencil on artist’s handmade flax/hemp paper, 18 x 12 inches

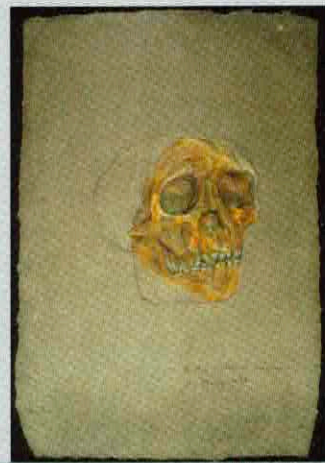
I listened to Mingus assiduously, playing his “Pithecanthropus” in my studio and responding directly with pulp-painted sequential pages. These became studies for a shaped accordion book that echoed the hominid’s story within the music. I drew everything—Mingus, *P. erectus*, and the musical score of Mingus’ piece. Seeing the drawings, Rick felt able to begin writing and he then emailed me several pages of material from Kenya. With precision, we defined the story to tell and the sequence. I carefully hand wrote Rick’s poetry onto each page, weaving the words intimately into my drawn images. Terry, having moved to Aurora, New York, assumed the role of our consultant on all things print-technical.



Lynn Sures, “1470—*H. habilis*,” 1996, color pencil on artist’s handmade flax paper, 18 x 12 inches



Lynn Sures, “Zhoukoudien” 1996, color pencil on artist’s handmade flax paper, 12 x 18 inches



Lynn Sures, “Taung Child,” 1996, color pencil on artist’s handmade flax paper, 18 x 12 inches