

Lynn Sures Artist Statement for Topographies of Life:

Looking at human fossils, maybe I can thereby get to know them, and while studying them have some wordless insights about who we humans are in the present day. I started out wanting to know the early *Homo erectus*; the first “makers” as I learned in my reading and discussions with paleoanthropologists. I spent almost two years drawing and painting and reading about these ancestors who made and slowly improved upon hand axes and other stone tools. Because they made things with their hands, I identified with them. After the years of studying *H. erectus* I realized I was ready to investigate the archaic *Homo sapiens* and the Neanderthals. These ancestors of ours were the first artists, I had learned from researchers, who were reporting on their findings to the scientific community. I was electrified to know that ochre was used as a decorative or artistic pigment; that Neanderthals had done cave paintings. I began to draw these more recent species, looking for the light that might connect them to me and my fellow artists. This is still very much where I am in my artistic research.

Drawing allows me focused study, analysis, and connection with an object, individual, or site. In Kenya, I looked for points of convergence between our early ancestors’ traits, capacities, and habitat. I made drawings of human and animal fossils at the National Museums of Kenya in Nairobi. I camped with scientists at the Smithsonian Institution’s field research site at Olorgesailie, drawing the excavation sites and coming to know the vivid, harsh, physical site itself, infused with evidence of early human presence. Pulp painting, later in my own studio, releases the emotionally driven responses to the subjects I’ve studied in drawings. In Washington, at the National Museum of Natural History, I continue to draw fossils as I did during my Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship, now as a Human Origins Program researcher. The potent bond of ecology—landscapes, habitats, and living creatures—permeates my practice at this point.