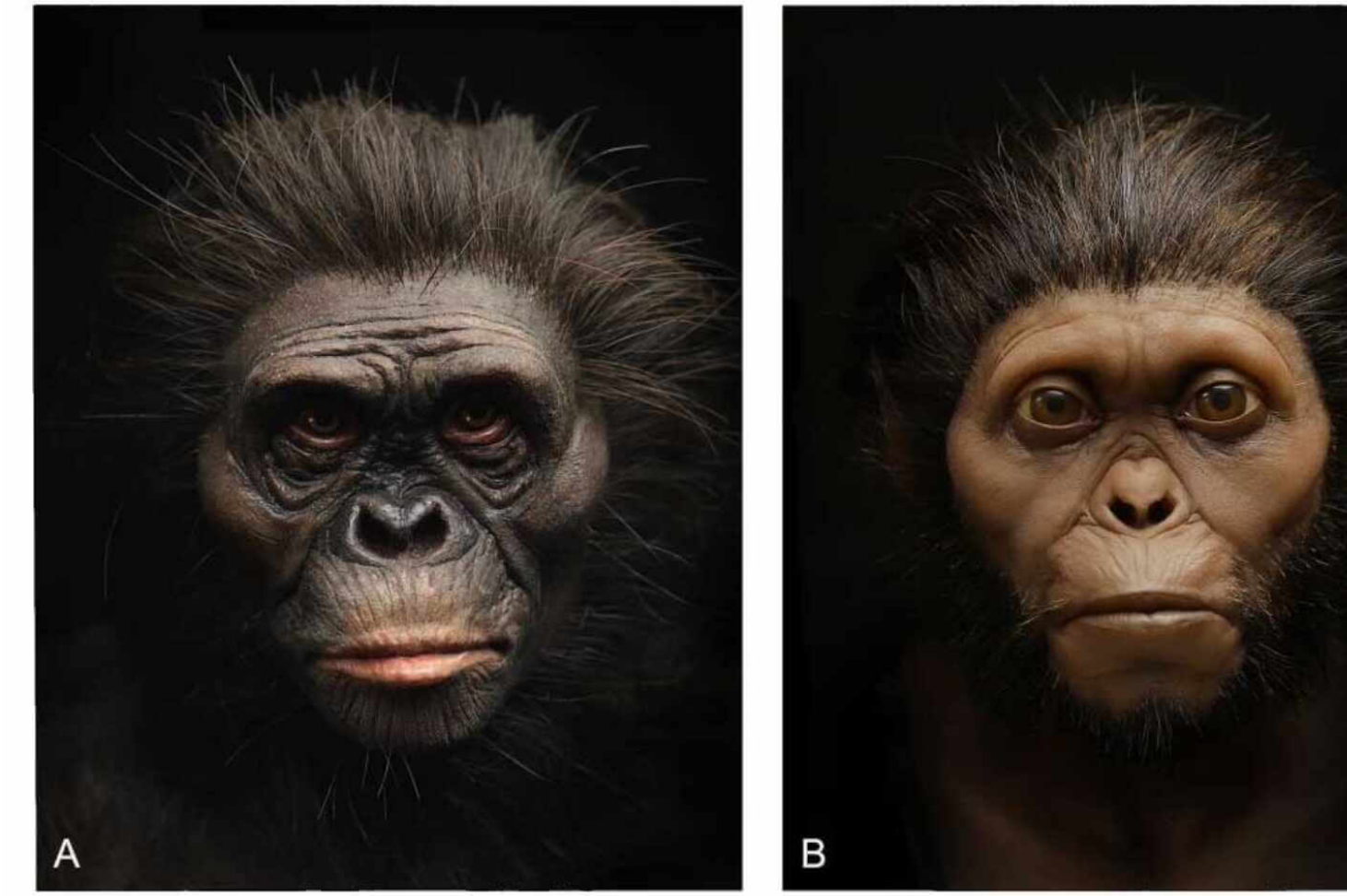
What did Lucy and the Taung child look like? Early human ancestors get reconstructed faces

For the reconstructions of Lucy (Australopithecus afarensis), the oldest and most complete human ancestor when researchers discovered her 3.2 million-year-old remains in 1974, and the 2.8 million-year-old Taung child (Australopithecus africanus), who died at age 3 in what is now South Africa, researchers used pigmented silicone casts, with Lucy's skin tone similar to that of a bonobo (Pan paniscus), while the Taung child's features were more similar to modern humans native to South Africa, researchers wrote in a blog post.

These casts show just how complex reconstructions of early humans are. Other reconstructions of Lucy, the Taung child and other early humans were made by artists who made assumptions that aren't testable with current science, including whether these ancient species looked more like apes or modern humans, and how their soft tissues, including their muscles and the thickness of their skin, appeared. These reconstructions are often found in natural history museums and are meant to educate the public about human evolution.

"I expected to find consistency in those reconstructions displayed in natural history museums, but the differences, even there, were so severe that I almost thought all previous practitioners had never encountered a single hominid reconstruction before commencing their own," [said lead researcher Ryan Campbell.]



The new facial reconstructions, made from pigmented silicon casts, of Lucy (left) and the Taung child (r
Credit: R. Campbell, G. Vinas, M. Henneberg, R. Diogo

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