



D59 A National View of Forensic Art: Current Forensic Art Units and the Services They Provide

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the scope of forensic art and the extensive use of this discipline across the United States.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by introducing the law enforcement departments and locations of the forensic art units and practitioners across the nation. It will also educate the forensic community about the different aspects of forensic art.

Forensic art is any art that is used in the court of law. This includes composite sketches, facial reconstruction, post-mortem images, age progressions, and image clarifications. Forensic art has evolved through the decades and now has updated tools and research to draw from. Not only are forensic artists using the traditional skills of drawing, many have also incorporated graphic software skills to enhance images for criminal investigations. Forensic art is a valuable investigative tool in multiple situations for detectives and forensic scientists alike.

The United States has approximately 28 full-time forensic art units identified around the country, with about 45 full-time artists. There are also at least 80 part-time forensic artists who work for law enforcement agencies or universities. The presentation will inform forensic scientists of the available resources in their area and around the country.

Forensic art is not, and does not claim to be, a positive identification technique. Forensic art is an information-generating tool, primarily used to create leads in a case by stimulating the memory of the public. It is used to assist with the identification of unknown decedents as well as unknown criminal suspects. The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) funded program called NamUS is an online database where details about unidentified decedents and information of missing individuals can be matched up. This site estimates that there are approximately 40,000 unidentified human remains in the medical examiner's offices around the country. Also in a typical year, medical examiners and coroners handle approximately 4,400 unidentified human decedent cases, 1,000 of which remain unidentified after one year (www.namus.gov). In 2003, there was also a DNA Initiative launched by the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) and the NIJ that provides DNA analysis for all unidentified and missing persons across the nation for free, provided by the University of North Texas. Currently there are approximately 7,923 unidentified persons in NamUS and 7,432 missing persons in NamUS. Professional, quality forensic art is a key tool in this initiative, providing postmortem images and facial reconstructions that give the investigators examining the cases a clear image of the unidentified decedent that might foster a lead to the identification of a missing person. The presentation informs the viewers of the resources available around the country to utilize forensic art skills and to make them aware of the possible cases that forensic art may be used for.

Forensic Art, Unidentified, Identification