



E23 What Lawyers Need to Know About Forensic Art

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand: (1) the fundamental aspects of forensic art and its part in a criminal investigation; (2) what the prosecution and defense need to know, the qualifications of professional Forensic Artists (FAs); and, (3) the value for detectives in identification will also be covered.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by raising awareness of the forensic art discipline and understanding how this discipline is an advantage when dealing with forensic drawings in the courtroom.

Forensic art has been used in the United States of America since the 1800s. The first and most common usages were for "wanted posters" of unknown criminals. Diagrams of crime scenes were also important aspects to documenting criminal behavior. Forensic art is an expanding field that is practiced throughout the United States as well as internationally. There are over 175 practicing FAs connected to law enforcement agencies across the country. Forensic artists produce **information generating images** that help investigators develop more leads and ultimately solve cases.

Computer facial imaging programs have had limited and disappointing results. Most operators are focused on how to use the software, rather than on their witness and conducting a neutral and productive interview. Few of these operators have the skills to render a lifelike image, and software training is limited.

Composites usually illustrate a suspect's image but may also be of a witness, or another victim that is sought. An illustration of a tattoo, stolen items, or sometimes vehicles are also described to a forensic artist for the creation of an image. The discipline also includes other, equally complex, applications. Principle areas include facial reconstruction, postmortem drawings, age progressions, digital imaging, and approximation drawings from videotape. With each application, the detective is relying upon the professional assistance of a forensic artist to get more information about a person involved in their investigation.

Both prosecution and defense need to know the same things. Is the artist employed by or connected with a law enforcement agency? How the drawing was developed and was it done without prejudice? Was the forensic artist trained specifically in forensic art? Training is key and the cognitive interview, an essential part of that. Composites are an illustration of what the witness recalls. This interview process assists the artist with witnesses who are traumatized by the event, gripped by the fear of retaliation for cooperating with authorities or lying about what they saw.

Tools and methodologies can vary around the country. Many forensic artists use a facial identification reference book, take notes and sign their work while others do not. There is a wide latitude in the construction of the drawing but focused agreement on the narrow constraints involved for not leading the witness and neutrality in the interview. Certifications are available but not often required and there is no national certification at this time.

In some cases, forensic artwork may outright illicit an identification, in other cases it often plays a supporting role of corroboration or elimination. A jury reacts to a drawing that shows similarity to the defendant, knowing that the victim or witness was sincere in their description. They like to understand the process that developed that image.

Forensic art is a discipline that requires specialized training, above and beyond advanced drawing skills. Applications relate closely with those of other disciplines of the forensic sciences, especially forensic anthropology, forensic odontology and forensic psychology.

Forensic Art, Face Reconstruction, Forensic ID