



E37 Diligence, Dedication, and Devotion: Reaching Back Into History for the Image of a Victim

Sandra R. Enslow, BA, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, Monterey Park, CA 91755*

Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will understand some of the difficulties that forensic artists often encounter with facial reconstructions. Facial reconstructions are developed from the skull or, in this case, photographs of the skull in order to get a better understanding of what a victim looks like. This information may possibly identify a victim, even if the case is 28 years old.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by raising awareness of the work that forensic artists do for their detectives and investigators. The majority of this work goes beyond drawing a composite of a suspect. In this presentation, an outstanding cold case criminal investigation that requested a facial reconstruction will be presented. The female victim's skeletal remains were discovered in 1980 in a dry riverbed in a suburb of Los Angeles County. The skull had a bullet hole in it. This informative presentation will highlight original photographs, step phases, and finalized images of the victim's face.

The skeletal remains were cremated at some point, which sometimes happens. This does not deter a forensic artist, but rather sends them down other avenues for the information they seek. Vital information and clues about the face can be found in the anthropologist's final report. This turned out to be the case here. The Los Angeles County Coroner's Office anthropologist in 1980 noted descriptive features about the victim's palate and orbital sockets. This information was extremely helpful and gave the forensic artist specific direction in producing those parts of the image.

There were two challenges in this case. First, without the actual skeletal remains, the photographs of those remains became the crucial source for reference. The photo of the skull, while somewhat clear, was taken for general documentation purposes only. This photo was not to the standard used for a facial reconstruction. The care and specificity that a forensic artist would have applied to the angle and presentation of the skull for photography purposes was not there. Approximating the Horizontal Frankfort position was not possible. There were no lateral views of the skull.

The second challenge was the missing mandible. Many skulls are discovered without this important part of the skull. For forensic artists, this just goes with the territory and is often the rule rather than the exception. In Photoshop®, a new mandible is generated and applied in the photographic phase. This allows the continuation of the facial reconstruction, although it is not ideal.

The skull needed to be reconstructed before the facial reconstruction could even begin. The skull's right side was intact, but the zygomatic bone on the left side had been broken off. This had to be approximated and accepted as similar to the right side.

This case was considered to have possible connections to another serial murder series in the Southern California region. Whether this individual had been a victim of the serial murderer remains to be seen, although the location and time frame position her as a candidate. Creating the image, then obtaining an identification of the victim were the first two steps in the process of finding a possible connection. Much of that casework is still ongoing.

Forensic art is a rapidly expanding discipline that requires specialized training, above and beyond advanced drawing skills. The forensic artist is called upon for many different skill sets that assist in the identification process. Applications relate closely with those of other disciplines of the forensic sciences, especially forensic anthropology, forensic odontology, and forensic psychology.

Facial Reconstructions, Forensic Art, Forensic Imaging