E25 Seeing vs. Knowing: Overcoming the Brain's Filters to Render Realistic Forensic Sketches

Sharon K. Moses, PhD, Northern Arizona University - Anthropology, Flagstaff, AZ 86011-5200*

Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will have a better understanding of how a properly trained forensic artist must develop new interpretive perceptions on how they view human faces in addition to learning facial anatomy.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating that forensic art can benefit from the artist who has learned how to interpret visual references through light, shadow, and negative spaces rather than trying to render an image modeled from one's own memory and notions of what an image *should* look like. The value of this presentation will be to aid in understanding the obstacles forensic artists face and the reward awareness can impart for better, more realistic composite sketches.

Our brains compile a data set of stock images to which it will refer with regularity based upon what we have seen and interpreted during our lifetimes. These images are compiled from many different formats (moving images, photographs, illustrations, and real subjects). In addition, the human brain wishes to simplify what it cannot recall in detail. Forensic artists must re-train themselves on how to view images as defined by light, shadow, and shape as presented, not as we tend to think of them in 3D space. Filters created by the brain for stored imagery dictate how people or faces are *supposed* to look in our minds. Ironically, these filters often interfere with our ability to generate realistic composite images. A forensic artist's re-training in their perception is necessary in order to bypass the filters our brain imposes. Composite artists must first "unlearn" those filters to generate realistic images from witness descriptions and reference materials.[1-3]

This presentation discusses the skills and training methods utilized by some forensic artists to produce a more realistic composite sketch. The goal of a composite sketch is not to produce portraiture but is about producing a likeness that will aid law enforcement in the recognition and/or identification of a suspect. The composite sketch helps law enforcement eliminate unnecessary time and energy expended toward individuals who do not fit within that suspect pool as described. Digitally generated images and software programs are not the focus of this presentation, but there will be some reference to them as a point of comparison on digitally produced images versus hand-drawn images from witness accounts and ways the brain is or is not engaged in what is produced. This presentation will impact the forensic community by demonstrating how more realistic composite images can be produced with proper training and that such skill is not necessarily rooted only in one's inherent talent.

Reference(s):

1. Parks, Carrie Stuart. *Secrets to Drawing Realistic Faces*. F&W Media, 2003.
2. Parks, Carrie Stuart. *Composite Drawing*. Stuart-Parks Forensic Associates, 1988.
3. Taylor, K. *Forensic Art and Illustration*. Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2001.

Forensic Art, Brain Patterning, Drawing

*Presenting Author