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Courtesy of Barbara Martin Bailey

Barbara Martin Bailey works on a skull to rebuild a face with clay.

The art of science: Forensic sketch artists combine disparate talents

by Hallie D. Martin
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Joy Mann had to base her sketch only on the charred face of a young woman.

The woman was found in a smoldering dumpster on a wintry January day outside Borg-Warner Automotive Inc. in Lombard. Police removed the badly burned body and called Mann, a forensic artist, to do a post-mortem sketch of the face so they could air the picture on the 10 p.m. news.

"I was under a lot of pressure," Mann said. Most of the young woman's skin was burned off, so Mann drew the face using the woman's bone structure as a model.

Meanwhile, a mother called the police. Her daughter hadn't returned from work. The young woman had a baby, and it was unlike her to not come home.

The sketch aired at 10 p.m.

Police had a hit; the mother recognized the sketch and a ring the police found on the body, and called later that night.

In this 2004 case, Mann's sketch helped identify Shauna R. Rosales. She died of a cocaine overdose and her companion Richard D. Atkinson panicked, dumped her body and set her on fire.

Finding the identity of an unclaimed body isn't as easy as *Law & Order* or *CSI* make it out to be.

Police can compare tattoos, fingerprints, dental records or X-rays records to the deceased, said Cook County Medical Examiner Dr. Nancy L. Jones.

DNA comparison is also an option, but can take six to eight weeks and is not as cost effective or more accurate than dental records.

"You don't take a drop of blood, drop it in a machine and Bing it's done," Jones said. "The tried and true methods work best."

But when all avenues are dead ends, a forensic artist's talent is needed.

"We're the last resort when the police have utilized all other resources," Mann said.

To see what the unnamed body looked like, the police sometimes call a forensic artist to do post-mortem sketches, facial reconstruction and age progressions so the police can rally the help of the public by releasing a photo.

Forensic artists also do composite sketches to draw a face of a suspect.

The Art of Science

Mann never thought she'd be a forensic artist. She was going to law school, then she got pregnant, and by the time her second child was about 15 years old, she just wasn't interested in going back.

Someone at her church knew Mann had a background in art, and suggested she try forensic art.

Mann liked the idea and began contacting people.

There is no formal training for forensic artists; it isn't on the regular curriculum at any college or university in the U.S., but professional forensic artists sometimes offer classes. Lois Gibson, who is a full-time artist for the Houston Police Department, teaches an annual summer class at Northwestern University's Academy of Public Safety.

"I taught myself," Gibson said, adding she also took a class from the FBI in 1983. "I had people describe other people to me, and then I'd see how close I could get."

Forensic artists need to have a background in art, but they also need to know anatomy to draw accurately and sculpt faces in clay. They also work with anthropologists to figure out the missing or the suspect's age, sex and race, Mann said.

"Beyond that, it's really an art."

Artistic depiction of suspects is mostly done by computers these days, with the witness clicking different features, but technology can miss details an artist gets only from human communication.

Artists draw sketches of suspects with the victim or witness by their side to illustrate the face for the police.

They ask witnesses or victims to tell them about the nose, the eyes, the lips, the hairline, the shade of the skin.

"If the witness is not lying, the artist will draw a person who will look similar," Gibson said.

But the artist has to be careful not to coach the victims or witnesses. The description has to come from them and that's why they have to ask open-ended questions; no "did they have blue or brown eyes," or "were they black or white?"

That, Mann said, takes a lot of practice. And sometimes detectives try to influence the process by interjecting their opinion or swaying the witnesses or victims based on a suspect they have in mind.

Composite sketches come under a lot of fire from some law enforcement officials, saying the witness' memory tends to be shoddy. And sometimes the witnesses or victims are scared and say they can't remember.

"Every single witness says 'I can't remember,' and that's a false statement. They can," Gibson said. "It takes less than a second to recognize a face."

Mann likes to have the witness sit next to her because it helps them remember better.

"When people do sit next to me, they get more involved and their memory starts to kick in better," Mann said. "They get into this dance when it all kicks in."

If a fugitive is on the loose or a child is missing for many years forensic artists can do an age progression drawing to give law enforcement an idea of what that person would look like.

Artists take that biology of how a face changes as people age and draw a new face: more lines, a drooping nose, bigger ears, possibly a receding hair line.

"Facial tone makes you look young," said Barbara Martin Bailey, a forensic artist in Michigan. "As you age, gravitation pull sets in, things droop, and you lose tone."

Artists can visualize the drooping, the sagging, the growth of the face and draw a new face.

Gibson was called to do a sketch of the face of Baby Grace, a toddler that was found in a box on the shore of Galveston, TX bay last October. The baby was badly decomposed, but Gibson was able to see through the decomposition and draw a face.

The drawing aired, and Baby Grace's grandmother in Ohio recognized the face as Riley Ann Sawyers.

"I just look at the skull," Gibson said. "You look at the bone structure and can see it's the same person."

Post-mortem sketches, like the one Mann did of the charred young woman, are drawn to identify unnamed bodies for the news media or to put into a missing person's database.

These sketches are done even when a body is badly decomposed or mangled, and the artists can work just by studying the bone structure in the face.

"You can identify a person's features from the bone structure," Gibson said. "One facial bones set in, they are [always] going to be the same shape. You have to have a sense of it."

Facial reconstruction is also used to identify the unnamed.

Barbara Martin Bailey volunteers for Project Everyone Deserves A Name, an organization that puts faces on unnamed people. Project EDANS is a branch of the Doe Network, a volunteer and internet-based organization that identifies unnamed bodies.

Bailey's background is also in art, with a degree in art education from Eastern Michigan University.

She was working on her degree in the 1960s, when the serial killer John Norman Collins, the "Co-Ed Killer," was terrorizing Ypsilanti, MI.

The first victim lived two blocks from Bailey.

The second victim worked across the street.

The fourth victim was hitchhiking and was picked up in front of Bailey's house.

"I said, 'you can all sit here and pull the covers over your heads, but I'm going to go get him,'" Bailey said. "You got to have someone who can draw a real nose and a real eye."

Bailey based a sketch of the suspect on an interview with someone who saw him, and she helped the police catch Collins.

"The drawing [the police] had out was terrible," she said. "I did it to prove a point. Then on, I knew I wanted to do this permanently."

After that, Bailey set out on her goal of being a forensic artist and is trained in the two methods of facial reconstruction, The Manchester or European method, and the American method.

She took basic facial reconstruction and advanced classes in Norman, Okla. with Betty Pat Gatliff, a leader in teaching and developing forensic sculpture. Bailey then went to England to study professional facial reconstruction in clay at the University of Manchester with Richard Neave, a pioneer of facial reconstruction.

"It's art and science combined when you do a facial reconstruction," Bailey said.

Both methods start with the actual skull or a cast of the skull, and artificial eyes similar to those optometrists use to make replacement eyes. Artists use tissue depth charts to approximate how thick the skin was based on characteristics of the deceased: were they a man or a woman; fat, average or skinny; what race and how old were they?

Pegs stick out of the skull with numbers on them to indicate how thick to make the clay, and the reconstruction begins.

The Manchester, or European, method uses more anatomy than sculpture, and the artist is submerged for two days in clay.

The artist first builds the muscle groups, then a layer of clay is placed over that to represent soft tissue, then a final layer of clay is smoothed out over that for the "skin."

The American method relies more on sculpture than anatomy, Bailey said, and takes about three to five days.

But artists can't be successful if they don't have something to compare it with, or if the public doesn't see the face to recognize it.

"In our positions we need to have a central data base so we can run missing person photos against unidentified people artwork," Bailey said. "Then you can line up and match people from other states."

A Repressed Profession

In 1979 Bailey was hired as a clerk who could draw well at the Oakland County Sheriff's Office in Michigan. Twenty-three years later, she convinced her bosses to create her current position: forensic artist.

Bailey is one of 15 full-time forensic artists in the country. Gibson is another. Mann used to work full-time for DuPage County, but now freelances.

Forensic artists are not exactly at the top of the hiring list for many police departments because of money, said Commander Tom Geunther of the Evanston Police Department.

The need for forensic artists to draw composite sketches was greater in days before computers, which are taking their jobs.

"A lot of law enforcement agencies don't appreciate how much better an artist can do than a computer," Mann said, adding it takes human communication to get a good description from a witness. "Many have never used a forensic artist, and that's a real frustration."

The computers list facial features, including hair line and eye shape, and the witness or victim can click on the feature and put together a depiction, Geunther said.

Before computers, there were identikits, which were transparencies of various facial features layered on top of each other and copied to make a suspect depiction.

"There are a lot of artists out there," Geunther said. "But Picassos wouldn't be able to draw out details or sketch a person."

There is no full-time forensic artist in the Chicago area.

"It's a crime against humanity to not have a full-time forensic artist," Gibson said. "There are criminals getting away for not having sketch artists."

Technology sometimes can miss the details an artist puts in.

"I've seen some excellent drawings," Geunther said. "Sometime if you take the human touch out of things, the technology doesn't compare."

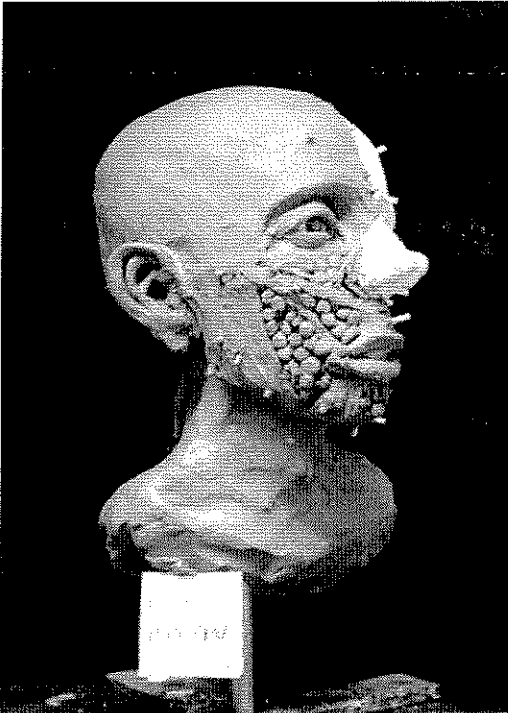
Forensic art is a relatively small profession and sometimes law enforcement can be skeptical about whether forensic artists are actually effective.

"Law enforcement is not letting them in," Gibson said. "My purpose in life is to have them turn around and to get an artist in every department."

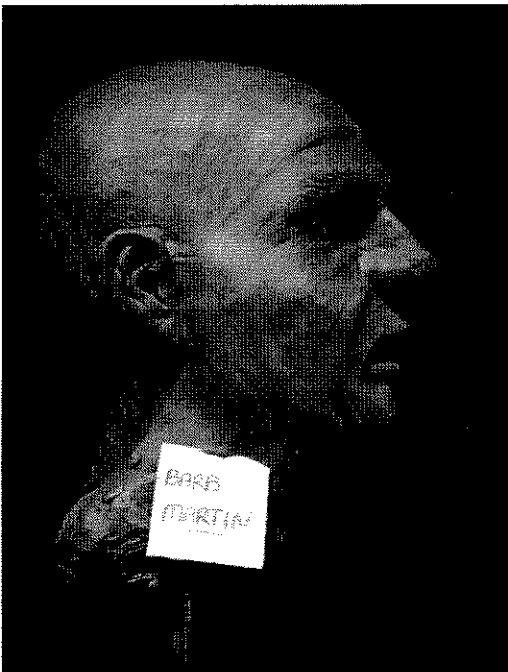
Forensic artists aren't as prevalent here, Geunther said, and he's never had to employ someone to do facial reconstruction or post-mortem sketches.

Forensic artists are used more in the south and the West, and are starting to be used more in the East, but the Midwest is a bit behind, Mann said.

"We don't get enough respect, except from the people who have luck with us," Mann said.



*Courtesy of Barbara Martin Bailey
Using the Manchester Method of forensic facial reconstruction, Bailey mimics the facial muscles.*



*Courtesy of Barbara Martin Bailey
The finished product; Bailey used bone structure, anatomy and sculpture as a guide to rebuild a face from a bare skull.*

“Techni-criminology”

Out in the deep droves of the internet, there are Techni-Criminologists searching for clues to find the names of unidentified bodies.

“Our office is a virtual office,” said Todd Matthews, 37, the media director for the Doe Network, a group of volunteers hunting for the unclaimed’s names. “We’re an internet based organization.”

Techni-criminologists are not genealogists or criminal investigators. They start with clues from police reports, medical examiners and other investigations, and hunt for clues that might have been missed.

"We take data, fill in holes by scouring the internet for media, and fill in the blanks," Matthews said. "Validating data, finding missing pockets of data, we connect smaller pieces to make bigger pieces."

Matthews is one of eight administrators who run the Web site. His work started in 1998 after an obsession with Tent Girl, an unnamed woman found in the backwoods of Kentucky by Matthew's father-in-law in 1968. Matthews found a message on the internet from Tent Girl's sister 30 years later, and was able to connect the dots.

Tent Girl's identity was soon confirmed as Barbara Ann Hackman-Taylor.

"In 1998, there was a newness [on the internet]," Matthews said. "Once all the data came in, it didn't take me long to get to Tent Girl."

The rapid growth of the web has helped The Doe Network's searches and allowed it to grow from a discussion board to an international network.

"It's far more manageable, and we grow and move with it," Matthews said. "Media is online and that was rare in 1998. Law enforcement was not online then, and now everybody's got a dot com."

Another component to The Doe Network is Project Everyone Deserves A Name, a group of forensic artists that reconstruct faces to help identify unclaimed bodies.

"It's hard to believe we can put a person on the moon, but are still burying people of unknown," said Barbara Martin Bailey, a forensic artist who volunteers with the Doe Network. "With all the science and forensics and the DNA we got going, what a shame."

Both networks work with law enforcement, and take credit for identifying 42 unclaimed people.

There are 7,021 Unidentified Persons listed in the FBI's system, and the Doe Network won't stop until they are put out of work.

"Only body that shouldn't be identified is the one that shouldn't be found," Matthews said.