ANIL AGGRAWAL'S
Internet Journal of
Forensic Medicine and Toxicology
The world's first online journal devoted entirely to forensic medicine and toxicology · Published 1 January and 1 July

VOL. 3, NO. 1
Downloaded from www.anilaggrawal.com · ISSN 0972-8074 (Online) · https://www.anilaggrawal.com/ij/vol_003_no_001/reviews/tb/page008.html

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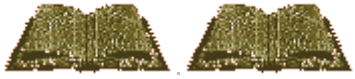

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REVIEWS IN THE PREVIOUS ISSUE | NEXT ISSUE

...MAKING FACES ...In a highly interesting and fascinating presentation, leading forensic artist Karen T. Taylor explains how we can use art for administration of law and justice...

Forensic Art and Illustration, 1st Edition, *by* Karen T. Taylor. Hard Bound, 7" x 10".
CRC Press LLC, 2000 Corporate Blvd., N.W., Boca Raton, Florida 33431, , . Publication Date 9/15/2000. xxii + 580 pages, ISBN 0-8493-8118-5 (alk. paper). Price $89.95

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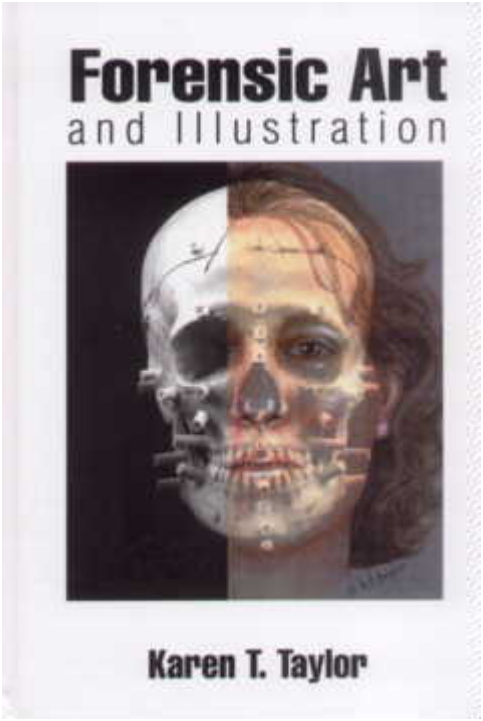


Karen T. Taylor



Karen T. Taylor is a freelance portrait artist who worked for 18 years as a forensic artist at the Texas Department of Public Safety in Austin, Texas. She has been a freelance portrait sculptor for Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum. The success of her forensic art led to her being named one of the "Texas Women of the Century".

We have all seen - with some bewilderment - in TV and movies, how a police artist makes faces of criminals based on descriptions given him by a witness or witnesses. Or how he makes a face out of the skull that was provided to him by the police. How does he do that? What is this science called? How can one take this profession as a career? Answers to questions such as these can now be found in the brand new bestseller by Karen T. Taylor, a Texas based forensic artist, who has been in this business for almost 20 years now.

But first things first. Although I am including this book in our "Technical Books" section, the book is written in an almost completely non-technical language. So much so, that I would imagine even an average general reader would find this book a great read. Crime buffs, writers, media men and generally everyone connected with reporting of crime in some way would find it very useful too.

View this book on Amazon

As I thumbed through the book, I was struck by the large number of photographs and drawings that greeted me on almost every page. So numerous are the diagrams and photographs, that one can spend hours looking at just these. This is very appropriate too in a book that basically deals with art and illustration. The book often takes on the flavor of an atlas because of these illustrations.

The book is divided in four parts - each a self sufficient and logical study unit on its own. Part I deals with the preliminaries, so to say. For those of us, who are still not clear what forensic art is, chapter 1 would strive to provide an answer. It is any art that aids in the identification, apprehension, or conviction of criminal offenders, or that aids in the location of victims or identification of unknown deceased persons. Forensic art is often multimedia in nature; its primary purpose is to present visual information.

WHAT'S IN THE BOOK: AT A GLANCE

Ms Taylor has divided her book in four neat parts. Each part makes a self-sufficient logical study unit.

Basic Drawing tools and materials (from page 78)



Part I *deals with the BASIC CONCEPTS of Forensic Art. Starting with a definition of Forensic Art, it goes on to describe the history of forensic art and most importantly with the basic tools and materials one would need in his work. It also deals with the subtleties of drawing the human face. In this part, Ms. Taylor also discusses subjects such as "Style" in Forensic Art, Color Vs. Black and White drawing, lighting to attain perspective and facial proportions.*

Age progression of William White Graham as interpreted by the author (from page 280)



It is in Part II *that we "get on with the job" so to say. It deals with the role of the forensic artist in finding and IDENTIFYING THE LIVING. She explains the art of interview in great detail, and how to make faces of the criminal based on that interview. She calls this "Composite Imagery". Another task of the Forensic Artist is to extrapolate the age changes in fugitives' faces who are at large for*

quite some time. The amazing perfection with which she can predict these changes makes one feel as if she is possessed with some mystic power.

Facial reconstruction from skull (from page 385)



Part III *deals with the IDENTIFICATION OF THE DEAD. How do you make a face when it is severely mutilated? How do you make the face of a person, when you are just given his skull. This chapter deals with questions such as these. Ms. Taylor discusses two-dimensional as well as three-dimensional facial reconstruction, and also with the technique of superimposition.*

The author with John Walsh on "America's Most Wanted" (from page 540)

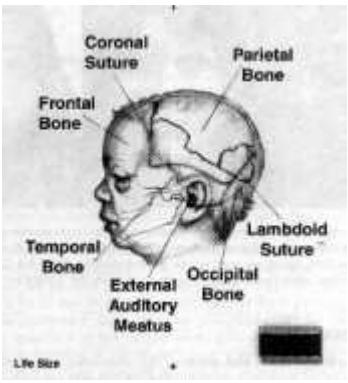


How should a Forensic Artist deal with the news media? What are the professional ethics and conduct he has to follow? Questions such as these are dealt with in Part IV *which happens to be the final part of this book. This part deals with the ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITES of the forensic artist. Also dealt with in this part is how to conduct oneself in the court.*

It is in this part that we are told that forensic art comprises of four main categories. First is *composite imagery*. It is this part an average person is most familiar with. A woman has been sexually assaulted in a dark alley. She was terrified and did not see the face of the attacker properly. In addition it was dark. How can the forensic artist get the maximum information out of her? How would he interview her? How can he even be sure that the information she gives is correct? And how would he then sketch the face of the attacker from this information? Questions like these are addressed in this category. In other words it deals with identification of the living.

The second category comprises of image modification and image identification. A murderer is at large for quite some time - even several years. His photographs dating back to several years are available with the police. And now the police asks the forensic artist to prepare a sketch of his face as it should be looking now. How does the forensic artist achieve this? This is a very tricky part, and the forensic artist should be thoroughly aware of the various changes that occur in a human face.

Demonstrative Evidence. Trial display by the author used in infant murder case to depict fatal injuries in contrast to natural suture lines of the skull. This figure appears on page 5



This category also involves various other aspects of image modification. For instance how does a forensic artist prepare a facial drawing from a surveillance image of a suspect caught in a camera? How can a forensic artist "see through" disguises? Or faces changed by surgery? Questions like this too are addressed in this category.

The third category deals with demonstrative evidence. It is how you present visual information in a court of law. Noting injuries on a person - dead or alive - may be one thing, but to demonstrate them effectively to the judge and jury is an entirely different game altogether. Being a forensic pathologist I know it for sure. We deal with severely mutilated bodies, and record the injuries as accurately as possible. But if we don't draw a diagram, we often fail to impress upon the judge, the severity of those injuries. The old Chinese adage, "A pictures says more than a thousand words" seems very appropriate in these circumstances.

The fourth and the last category of Forensic Art deals with the identification of the dead. It has several sub components, so to say. You get a badly mutilated body, with its face hardly recognizable. You do not know who he is. None of his relatives or friends is likely to be able to identify him in such a condition. How do you make matters simple for them? In other words, how can you make a reasonably accurate sketch of his face as it appeared in life? It is here that the forensic artist comes to our rescue. By applying some basic principles, as Ms. Taylor shows us in her book, one can make an accurate picture of that person's face.

Another task is to be able to make a person's face from his skull. It involves subtleties like knowing tissue depths at various points of the skull, applying just the right amount of plaster at those points and then sculpting the whole face. To be sure, the task is not as simple as that. One must take into account things such as age, sex, and even race of the person. If a sample of the person's hair is available, the task is somewhat easier.

Surveillance Image of suspect in a homicide case (top) from which a facial drawing was prepared by the author (lower left), and the subject identified. This figure appears on page 286



And yet another technique is superimposition - a technique first applied in the famous Ruxton case. If you have a skull and a photograph of the victim, how can you be sure, that the skull belonged to that victim? The technique of superimposition comes in handy in such circumstances.

Is forensic art, art or science? It is a blend of both. It involves intuition and inspiration, which are so essential components of arts, but at the same time, it includes several scientific principles, such as knowing the anatomy of the face, its expressions and so on.

How old is forensic art? Ms. Taylor gives an answer to this question in chapter 2 entitled "A History of Forensic Art". One of the earliest examples of a composite drawings appeared on an 1881 Scotland Yard "wanted" poster that depicted Percy Lefroy Mapleton, who was sought on a murder charge. During the reign of terror unleashed by Jack the Ripper in the late nineteenth century England, a measure of forensic art was seen, in the postmortem drawing of Catherine Eddows, one of the Ripper's victims. This sketch was done by Dr. F. Gordon Brown at the crime scene in 1888. So in a way, even he was a forensic artist. The author then goes on to describe the history of forensic art by decades. Important cases such as the murder of Polly Klaas, the Susan Smith child murders, the Oklahoma City bombing, and the murder of Ennis Cosby, in which forensic art played a role are discussed. In all cases, the sketches that were made by the forensic artists are shown.

Ms. Taylor often spices up her text with wit and humor. Sample this piece which appears on page 73: Michelangelo Buonnaroti, painter of the Sistine Chapel ceiling and sculptor of the *David,* was once asked to name the greatest art - painting or sculpture. He replied, "Drawing".

The point that the author wants to make is that drawing is fundamental to all other artistic endeavors. Drawing the human face, she tells us, forms the basis of most of their work. In this chapter entitled "Drawing the human face", Ms. Taylor tells us about drawing and blending tools, erasers and other tools and supplies. Which kind of pencil is best to use in which circumstances? Which eraser to use, and how? How to use eraser shields? Questions such as these are discussed here. There are sections on tools for enlargement, reduction and projection.

Forensic Art has found applications even in museum and historical work. Betty Pat. Gatliff, a forensic artist, is seen finishing the King Tutankhamen Mummy Project at the top left. At top right is the completed reconstruction with headgear. Custer Battlefield project (bottom). These pictures appear on pages 466 (top) and 469 (bottom).





Part 2 and part 3 deal with various techniques which a forensic artist can use in his work. Most of the sketches that appear in these parts have been made by the author herself after, say, interviews with witnesses, or from objects like the skull of the deceased. Most of the times, the real picture of the person is shown alongside, and as one looks at the sketch (done by the author) and the real picture, one finds it hard to believe that she has made it just by interviewing a person, or just from his skull. It almost appears as if she had seen the person beforehand. After going through these pictures, one really begins understanding the strong potential of this interesting forensic branch.

...Forensic artists and illustrators, students of Forensic art, forensic scientists, forensic pathologists, police personnel, lawyers, judges, and people in other law enforcement agencies would find this book immensely useful. The language used is so non-technical that even an average general reader would be able to follow and enjoy this book...

Part 4 deals with the additional responsibilities of the forensic artist. How does he conduct himself in a court of law. How does he take on the media. What are his professional ethics and responsibilities? These questions are addressed in this part. Let me give you an example to make things somewhat clearer. It might appear to a forensic artist that a drawing done by him must hit the media at once. So should he run to the media and hand over his drawing to them? The answer is NO. As the author tells us, it is the investigator's decision, and not the artist's, as to how, when, or even if a drawing will be disseminated. An investigator may plan to discreetly canvas a certain neighborhood with a composite drawing or even to show it to certain key individuals before mass distribution. Several questions like this are addressed in this part.

Forensic art is indeed emerging as a potent new weapon in crime investigation. Ms Taylor rightly ends her book with this quote: "*It has been said that the pen is mightier than the sword.. . if used correctly, so is the pencil....*"

Who would find this book useful? Firstly those persons, who want to take up forensic art and illustration as a career. For established forensic artists, it would prove to be an excellent text for recapitulation or even for familiarization of new facts. People in other sub disciplines of forensic science (e.g. forensic pathologists like this reviewer) would find this book immensely interesting, if only to know what this new and exciting branch is all about. Police personnel, lawyers, judges, and people in other law enforcement agencies would find it useful for obvious reasons. I would recommend this book even to general readers as this book is so devoid of technical language, and

so visually rich. Crime writers would find it useful if they want to give their stories a touch of science.

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