

Forensic Art: A Picture's Worth A Thousand Words

Using the Right CSI Tools to Solve Cases

*By Sandra Enslow,
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Los Angeles County
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Progression of a composite drawing by Sandra Enslow.

She was going to be in the next James Bond movie - or so she thought. On Saturday, February 15th, 2003, twenty-one year old Kristy Johnson met with a “producer” who promised her a starring role. She never came home.

Two days later, Kristy’s worried mother called the Santa Monica Police Department. Family and community concern was quickly mounting, but there was no trace of the young woman. Within days, Detective Virginia Obenchain put the case in the local paper, hoping someone would know more. As it turned out, someone did.

Susan, a twenty-five year old accountant, was approached a few weeks earlier by a producer offering the same role. Only Susan did something that Kristy didn’t do - she brought her boyfriend along. Once the producer saw him, he angrily called everything off.

Seeing Kristy’s story in the news, Susan and her boyfriend came forward, and agreed to work with a Forensic Artist.

Detective Obenchain called the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, and a composite was completed. Once it was published in the news media, the detective received calls from numerous women about the sketch. The beautiful women were also potential victims of the suspect, having been lured by the exciting promise of a movie role.

Although they survived their encounters, they felt too embarrassed to call the police.

The composite gave the investigation the kick-start it needed when multiple victims saw the likeness of their potential rapist, later proven to be forty-four year old Victor Paleologus, staring back at them. Parole Agent Larios saw the composite and immediately called the Santa Monica Police Department to identify the man in the composite as parolee Paleologus.

Low Cost Approach, High End Results

Detectives have a low cost advantage with a forensic artist as a multi-purpose approach to help solve many types of cases. Using a credentialed artist is the key to getting good information back quickly, potentially saving a lot of money in investigative time and overtime costs. To sheriff’s deputies, police officers, or the general public, the more professional the visual information, the better the response from those who view it.

A composite keeps on working, long after an arrest. Juries look for similarities in the drawing in comparison to the defendant. Defense attorneys understand this and know that a solid composite drawing is the last thing they want brought out in court.

Forensic art is often used to assist with cold cases. The court system approves of the “good faith efforts” of detectives to get an age-progression done of a suspect with a long-term outstanding warrant. Defense attorneys, again, understand that the age-progression assists detectives in showing the on-going efforts of locating a suspect.

High Tech Approach, Low End Results

Computer software can turn into a financial quagmire. Once the initial investment (\$10 to \$36,000 on average) is made, future updates are required and expensive (about \$5,000 every update). Deputies who use the software often lack training in interview techniques. The software has a finite choice of images to put together and this lack of flexibility often frustrates the witnesses. Eventually, detectives often avoid using it altogether, disappointed with its results. If you must rely on computer composite software, use it on the misdemeanor crimes but leave the serious crimes to a trained Forensic Artist.



Presentation Spotlights at the June 2010 NSA Conference

“Forensic Art: Using the right CSI tools to fight crime,” will be presented by Sandra Enslow, Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, at the June 26-30, 2010, National Sheriffs’ Association Conference in Anaheim, California. Visit www.sheriffs.org for conference information.

Forensic Art is a cost effective and efficient CSI service for detectives. Five key aspects of working with a qualified Forensic Artist will be highlighted. Using the right person for the right job translates into more information for a case, solving crime faster, saving thousands of hours and money.

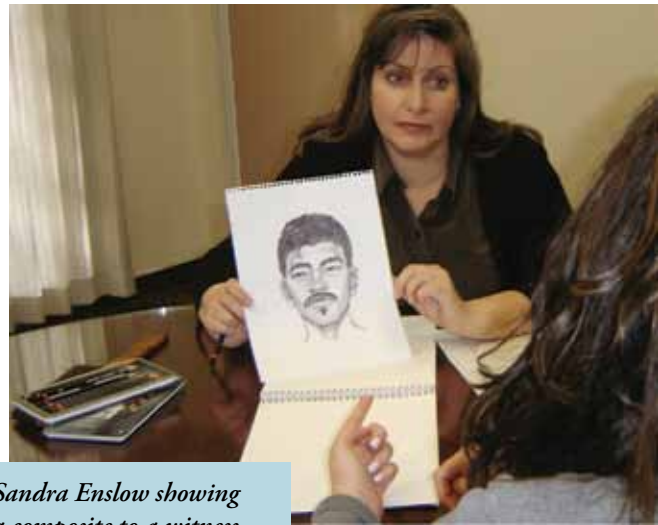
Handling High Profile Cases will be presented by experts of the Court Services Division, Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, at the National Court & Judicial Security Conference, National Sheriffs’ Association, June 30, 2010, Anaheim, California. Visit www.sheriffs.org for conference information.

Gang experts from the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department will make a series of presentations on gangs at the 19th Annual National Gang Conference of the California Gang Investigators Association and the Bureau of Alcohol, Firearms, Tobacco and Explosives. June 29-July 2, 2010, Anaheim, California. Visit www.cgiaonline.org for conference information.

Education-Based Incarceration.

Sheriff Lee Baca and other experts from the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department will present Education-Based Incarceration (EBI) on June 27, 2010, at the National Sheriffs’ Association Conference in Anaheim, California. Visit www.sheriffs.org for conference information.

EBI is the ultimate form of crime fighting. The six key points of EBI will be discussed, including how EBI reduces recidivism and lowers street crime, while being funded through Inmate Welfare Funds, not tax dollars. The comprehensive LASD EBI booklet will be handed out at the presentation.



Sandra Enslow showing a composite to a witness and a deputy. (Photos by Ignacio Mendoza)



Right Person For The Right Job

“There is no substitute for experience,” is a popular and applicable saying. Using an inexperienced person to draw for your cases is a set-up for disaster. Individuals taken away from their primary jobs may take many hours or days to produce what ends up being a poor quality likeness. Defense attorneys hope that your detectives used the inexperienced option. They know it can be used to their advantage and help their case.

Having a qualified artist for your detectives insures that you are getting “the most bang for your buck.” Composites, age progressions, facial reconstructions, courtroom diagrams, crime scene diagrams and photo lineups are just some of the graphic challenges your detectives face. A full time forensic artist is a cost effective investment - the right person for the right job. They work in an efficient manner and testify effectively in court. If you cannot afford a full time staff artist, then training an existing individual on staff, or hiring one as a consultant is the next best step.

Kristy Johnson's body was ultimately discovered in the Hollywood Hills by hikers. She had put up a fight and paid with her life. With a strong homicide case that included eyewitnesses, the suspect pled guilty and received 25 years to life in prison. Closure was given to her grieving family, and some justice was served, thanks in part to witnesses who came forward as a result of forensic art.



Composite later proven to be murderer and serial rapist Victor Paleologus, by Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department Forensic Artist Sandra Enslow. Booking photo: Santa Monica Police Department.

Sandra Enslow is a forensic artist and 16-year veteran of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD). She has sketched over a thousand composites and testified hundreds of times. Her efforts have contributed to the convictions of hundreds of felons. She has her B.A. in Commercial Illustration and Design, with forensic training from the LASD, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Northwestern University.

The LASD is the nation's largest sheriff's department, second largest policing agency, and in addition to dozens of patrol stations and the country's largest court security responsibilities, operates the nation's largest jail system. Visit www.lasd.org. 🗺

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