The Police Composite Sketch

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Preface

The police composite sketch is one of the most astounding investigative tools in law enforcement. It is based solely on a person's perception and memory of an unknown suspect. The police composite sketch is developed during the execution of a composite session. A composite session is an extreme exercise of human communication and drawing. It challenges the skills of an artist to understand and illustrate words of description to the highest level of performance. In today's world of forensic science and great leaps in technology, the forensic art discipline of police composite sketching still relies on the most basic aspect of the investigative community: the spoken word. It has proven itself during many difficult investigations to successfully help solve these criminal cases. This is one reason for the public's interest and amazement in these drawings.

Many intuitive insights are revealed during the composite session about witnesses, victims, and perpetrators. This intriguing knowledge has been noted over my many years in the implementation of composite sessions. This scholarship is not only based on these experiences, but also on the obscure aspects of human interaction, a condition all people are familiar with and operate within everyday. The structure of the composite session investigation exposes common trends. These trends were used to interpret and implement the following composite session philosophy and strategies.

Primarily a book about how to conduct a police composite session, applying these concepts will be explored in the context of actual experiences, cases, and questions asked. The learning opportunity in the answers to these questions and the understanding of these forensic art cases are a valuable illustration of the techniques applied during the development of the composite sketch. The hope is to answer some of the perplexity and dilemmas about this technique for the accomplished and aspiring forensic artist as well as for the average interested reader. Due to the complexity and diverse skills associated with the composite session, the information will be explored within a standard operating procedure as well as straightforward rules, basic guidelines, notable concepts, tips, and tangential narratives. These accounts will reveal a conduit into a successful philosophy about how to conduct a police composite session. The procedures offered are successful strategies and solutions. Read this book as a narrative from start to finish. It is a journey describing the road to

an effective investigative procedure, composite drawing technique, and philosophy. Plus, it illustrates one path to a rewarding career.

Peekskill, NY Stephen Mancusi

Acknowledgments

The contents of this book are based on my years of experience as the New York City Police Department's forensic artist. I offer a special thanks to the department for the opportunity to develop these forensic art skills. The NYPD and all its members are one of the most professional and talented police departments in the world. It was advantageous to have worked directly with other accomplished composite artists during my time with the NYPD. This bolstered the scholarship of the composite art philosophy put forth in this book.

It is also important to recognize Detective Frank Domingo as an integral part of the development of these composite art concepts. Sadly, he passed away in 2009; he is greatly missed.

Additionally, it was invaluable to meet and discuss forensic art issues with other artists over the years. On many occasions, I have been able to talk, teach, and learn from these colleagues. This book is offered in the modest of mindsets. It is acknowledged that a multitude of forensic artists are adding to the forensic art disciplines every day.

Lastly, thank you to my daughter Kayla for helping with this book.

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Chapter Briefs

1. Forensic Art and Composite Art

Forensic art includes the disciplines of composite art, image modification, age progression, facial comparison analysis, demonstrative evidence, and postmortem/skull reconstruction. The forensic artist should also have knowledge of victim psychology, facial anatomy, human memory, and aging trends. The ability to communicate with, interact with, and interview victims as well as witnesses from all walks of life for all sorts of crimes is a necessity. Composite art is an unusual marriage of two unlikely disciplines, police investigative work and art. The cop-artist, almost an oxymoron, possesses both skills.

2. The Composite Session

All composite sketches are done during a standard composite session. The composite session includes drawing and interviewing. The development of composite session skills is directly related to the level of professionalism one obtains. Though drawing is important, it is equally paramount to conduct an organized session and develop good interviewing skills. Even a skilled artist can ultimately fail at conducting a composite session without proper technique. A standard police composite session technique is further revealed with actual case studies. Session and interviewing strategies are explored.

3. Drawing the Composite Sketch

The three-stage composite drawing method is explained. The first stage of the drawing is the proportional sketch, which is a simple line drawing with all the facial features slightly suggested in their desired proportional locations. The second stage of the sketch is the characteristic stage. The artist is delineating the shapes of the facial features. The third stage of the sketch is the rendering stage. During the

rendering stage of the drawing, the artist depicts the forms and textures of the head in light and shadow.

4. Witnesses and Victims

It is essential for the artist to acquire perceptiveness about different types of witnesses and victims. The way certain types of witnesses and victims responded in the past during composite sessions has revealed recurring trends. Acknowledging some of these impressions will help the artist to conduct his or her composite sessions. The composite session participants are divided into several basic categories. Exploring how each type has generally responded in the past will reveal beneficial strategies.

5. Descriptive Terminologies, Responses, and Solutions

Communication is the cornerstone of any composite session. This communication between the artist and participant reveals a lexicon of terminology. This terminology is a valuable facet for the development of a composite sketch. Understanding the words used by a person to express his or her perception of a suspect's appearance is principal to the success of the composite. The following is an exploration of these words and some solutions.

6. Managing Difficult Composite Sessions

There is a degree of difficulty with all composite sessions, though most are conducted within standard procedures. This chapter explores challenging exceptions and circumstances that will require procedure adjustments and increased artist concentration. These will include field sketches, difficult witnesses and victims, witness deception, the press, high-profile cases, multiple witnesses, language barriers, department rules, and intrusions. If these conditions are not properly handled, it will swing the pendulum of success in the wrong direction.

7. General Drawing Tips

There are tips, techniques, and guidelines that will help create better composite sketches and improve an artist's drawing skills. The implementation of these concepts will assist all composite artists at any level. Most are based on common artistic knowledge and theory. Presenting some of them within the context of a composite session and the three sketching stages will offer a more practical application.

8. Composite Session Tips

This chapter presents some additional tips for conducting a composite session. They should be implemented in conjunction with the other session concepts, guidelines, and rules already presented. It is also important to have a working understanding of the levels of success a composite sketch and session can achieve.

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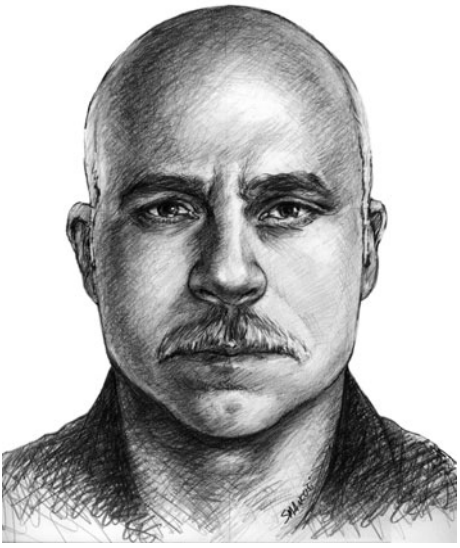
About the Author



Stephen Mancusi was the senior forensic artist and a first grade detective for the New York City Police Department for almost 27 years. Stephen was the recipient of many Chief of Detective awards presented by the NYPD's Detective Bureau for his part in successful criminal investigations within the city of New York. His expertise encompasses all the forensic art disciplines. His composite sketches have been instrumental in identifying many criminal suspects, including high-profile cases such as The Stuyvesant Town Rapist and the Central Park Assault Case. His drawings have appeared in all of the major New York newspapers, and in local and network TV news programs. He has been featured in articles in the *New York Times*, *London Sunday Telegraph*, *Evidence Technology Magazine,* and *The Daily News,* among others. Mr. Mancusi has appeared on ABC's "20/20," "New York Views," Discovery Channel, Court TV's "Justice Factory," Pro 7 German Television

Network, "Seven Network Australia Sunday Night," "Good Morning America," and History Channel's "MysterQuest." He is certified in forensic art by the International Association for Identification and sits on the board of the I.A.I.'s forensic art sub-committee.

As a forensic artist and NYPD detective, he has provided expert testimony during court proceedings throughout the city. In addition to his work for the NYPD, Stephen has developed forensic images for other law enforcement and governmental agencies, including the FBI and U.S. Postal Inspections Service.

A professional artist and illustrator for over 27 years, Stephen's skills encompass a variety of media, including 3D and 2D digital art, acrylics, oil, pencil, and pastel in a wide range of subject matter. His illustrative portfolio includes book jackets, magazine cover art, and poster art. A list of clients and examples of his work can be viewed at his website, www.forartist.com.

Stephen's paintings, pastels, and drawings have been exhibited in many New York galleries, including the prestigious The National Arts Club and Salmagundi Art Club in Manhattan. His artwork was part of several exhibits displayed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art as well as in the NYPD Police Museum.

On the lecture circuit, he has addressed a number of groups from varying disciplines, including the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), Mystery Writers of America, School of Visual Arts, and Society of Professional Investigators, to name a few. Because of his expertise in the field, Stephen has trained artists of other police departments throughout North America in the field of forensic art. He has conducted forensic art workshops during many forensic education conferences throughout the United States. He has also presented lectures and residences for schools and community groups throughout Westchester County and New York City.

Chapter 1
Forensic Art and Composite Art

Forensic Art

Forensic art includes the disciplines of composite art, image modification, age progression, facial comparison analysis, demonstrative evidence, and postmortem/skull reconstruction. Police composite sketching is one of the most complex skills in the field of forensic art. The forensic artist is a multi-skilled professional. Though drawing or sculpting ability is paramount, additional skills are required. The forensic artist should also have knowledge of victim psychology, facial anatomy, human memory, and aging trends. The ability to communicate, interact, and interview victims as well as witnesses from all walks of life for all sorts of crimes is a necessity.

In the past 25 years, the previously known "police sketch artist" has evolved into the "forensic artist." In fact, police composite artists are designated as forensic artists. Forensic art evolved when police composite artists of that time began to organize what we did. In the fall of 1984, the New York City Police Department (NYPD), under the initiative of Detective Frank Domingo of the NYPD's Artist Unit, held the First Composite Art National Symposium (Fig. 1.1). Interestingly, it was held in the World Trade Center, which was only a few blocks from the NYPD headquarters. I was fortunate to assist in the final stages of the organization of this symposium and attend it. The head of the FBI's Special Projects Section and over 50 artists from all over the nation were present. Many familiar names and faces in the forensic art world at that time attended this seminar (Fig. 1.2). All the forensic art issues that are discussed today were explored during this conference. It was one of the first steps in the organization of the forensic art field. As these police art concepts were laid out in the years that followed, it became evident that the word "forensic" was appropriate. It didn't hurt that at that time real-life television crime shows had just become popular. A national spotlight was cast upon many forensic disciplines' sciences and art.

The disciplines of forensic art have been used by law enforcement agencies throughout history. When one recalls the Old West, the classic wanted poster with a drawing of an outlaw comes to mind. Many of these drawings were police composite sketches. As an example, the New York City Police Department has had a continuously staffed Artist Unit since 1956, but it used composite sketches long before then.

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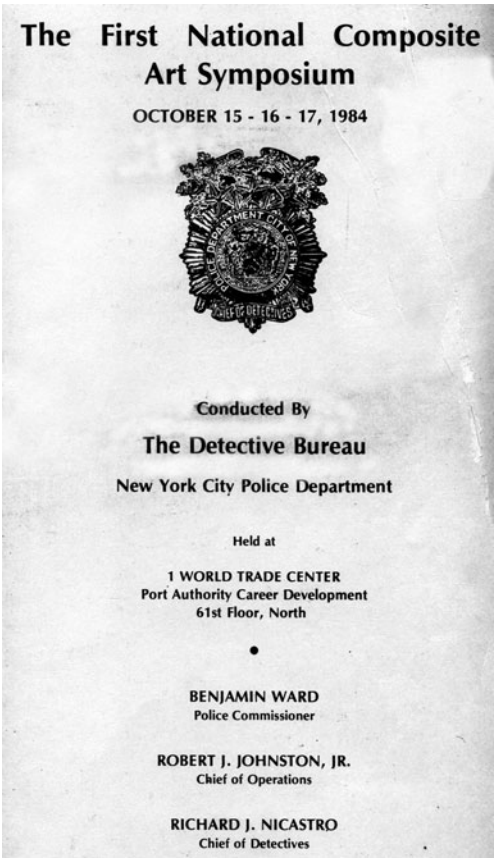

Fig. 1.1 "The First National Composite Art Symposium" program cover

The forensic artist primarily draws and sculpts but also uses a variety of computer technologies and digital imagery to help create practical investigative images. Over the years, forensic art has proven to be a formidable investigative tool. Time and time again in many celebrated cases throughout the world, it has been the key component in the solution of criminal investigations. On occasion, the forensic image has even pulled the proverbial rabbit out of a hat.

The word "forensic" does imply a scientific discipline. However, it refers to evidence that is brought into legal proceedings under expert testimony and open to debate. Though many of today's forensic artists have extensive scientific knowledge in specific forensic techniques such as skull reconstruction, it is still an art form. Consequently, forensic art is the artistic technique used in the identification, apprehension, or conviction of a wanted person. This person may not necessarily be a criminal, but could be a missing person or an unidentified deceased person. These forensic images are admissible in a court of law. A question often asked is, *are courtroom artists forensic artists?* The answer is no. These artists perform

Fig. 1.2 Composite Art Symposium attendees

their profession during legal proceedings. Generally, in contrast to the forensic artist, the completed artworks are not introduced as evidence, nor are they used for identification. Forensic art consists of the following disciplines.

Composite art: This is the technique of creating a sketch of an unknown subject from individually described parts into a single graphic image. It is intended to be a likeness or similarity of a victim's or witness's perception of the subject at the time the subject was seen.

Image modification: This is the alteration or enhancement of a photograph or video image for the purpose of updating, clarifying, or identifying a wanted subject. Age progressions and regressions are image modifications.

Postmortem reconstruction: Commonly known as skull reconstruction, this involves the rebuilding of facial features of unidentified badly decomposed or skeletal human remains. These images are created (1) digitally, (2) by sketching, or (3) three-dimensionally with clay. They are used for identification. Additionally, postmortem drawings are also reconstruction images. These are the facial drawings created by viewing photographs or the remains themselves of an unknown deceased person. In these cases, the bodies are relatively intact and not as decomposed. These drawings are used for identification.

Demonstrative evidence: This is the creation of visual materials that act as investigative aids or are used during legal proceedings as courtroom presentations.

Facial image comparison analysis: This is an opinion report based on an analysis of a comparison between multiple facial images. It attempts to determine if the subjects are the same individual. However, it is not necessarily meant to be a definitive facial recognition and/or a positive identification since the images in question could

be of varying quality. A degree of possibility is the norm for the outcome of the analysis as it relates to an identification or exclusionary result.

Becoming a Forensic Artist

The following question is often asked: *How do I begin to be a forensic artist?* The answer is simple. The pursuit of traditional artistic skills is an excellent avenue on which to begin. The best direction I can offer is a brief account of how I started. Though a little cliché, it is appropriate. My interest was always in art and illustration. I attended the State University of New York at New Paltz and the Fashion Institute of Technology, where I received a professional-level commercial art education. This is pertinent because, contrary to popular belief, art is a skill that requires quality instruction. Though creativity is somewhat inherent, the technical skills of drawing and sculpting must be learned. The forensic artist needs to be fluent in one or both of these techniques. The artist who skips the traditional study of art and decides to throw paint on a canvas, calling it "art," is puzzling. Where is the substance behind these images? Even Picasso knew how to paint and draw before he chose to do what he did. Forensic art is not an exception. The forensic artist must acquire traditional artistic skills first and then forensics.

Upon graduating from art school, I had a fledgling illustrative career mainly painting teenage novel book jackets. Unfortunately, it quickly became apparent that the field of graphic art is competitive and a difficult one from which to earn a living. It seemed at the time that law enforcement would be a profession that offered an avenue to pursue an art career. I tell all my younger students to keep one's eyes open for opportunities that may arise. A new prospect may not be exactly where you expect to find it. One never knows where a door might open; if it does, you should run through it. It can't be said that every door will be successful, but at least you should try. That is exactly what I did, though my interest in traditional law enforcement was minimal. A job that presented a chance to apply artistic skill in a police investigation capacity was very intriguing. I envisioned a path to a police artist position. It was a big step, but I saw an opportunity.

After joining the New York City Police Department in 1982, I worked as a patrol officer for a couple of years on the streets of Brooklyn in some of the toughest New York City neighborhoods. This was a far cry from a life as an artist. Yet the time on patrol offered many incidents from which to develop a unique perspective and understanding about the crimes' situations and their victims. It is not the only way to obtain this knowledge and interactive skills, but it is one of the most effective. The police officer experiences the confusion and intensity that follow most criminal acts. All the emotion, pain, uncertainty, horror, and environmental logistics are thrust toward the officer. These are situations that require actions and solutions. They are certainly learning experiences that help during a composite session.

Nevertheless, my interest and skills were still in art. Only a few months after graduating from the police academy, I inquired about applying to the Artist Unit.

However, early on, it seemed as if the door was closed. I remember being on patrol one day, standing on a street corner. It was a rare quiet and rainy day. I decided to make some phone calls. I went to the local store on my beat and got change for the pay phone—there weren't any cell phones back then. I wasn't sure how many calls I would need to make before I got through to the right person. It's a big department and getting through to the right person is easier said than done. Anyone who has ever called a large city department can certainly attest to that. Believe it or not, it is even the same for its members. I was hoping to get an idea about the reality of becoming the department artist. To this day, I am not sure if I ever really contacted the proper person. I did get in touch with someone whom I understood to be a police artist. I was told, "Kid, if you're not connected, you never get in. Besides there are no openings anyway." Well, being "connected" meant knowing someone of importance to go to bat for you, basically to make inquiries on your behalf to get appointed to the unit. I was not connected. It seemed as if it were a dead end and the door would never open. I almost gave up on the idea, but you should never give up on your dreams.

Only a short time later, the chance to apply to the NYP D's Artist Unit did arise. Upon coming back from a two-week vacation, my patrol partner told me he saw a department bulletin the week before looking for an artist. Much to my surprise, the opportunity door opened. I ran through it as fast as I could. I talked to Detective Frank Domingo, who was the senior artist at that time. He was looking to replace an unexpectedly retiring artist, Detective Bill McCormack. Bill was something of a salty seaman-type guy. He had white hair, white beard, and a weathered complexion with sunken cheeks. He was an accomplished artist in his own right, but he loved to fish. He had announced his retirement without much warning. Detective Domingo wanted to recruit a police officer with significant artistic skills to maintain a higher level of competency within the Artist Unit. He held interviews for the first time in the unit's history and extensively tested many applicants, including me. Well, we hit it off, and I was a police artist a few months later. My journey as a forensic artist began. I was grateful for the chance to be the department artist. It is very difficult to attain this position, and I knew it. Perseverance and the ability to see the path to one's goals is an answer to how to get there. Possessing professional-level art skills and having a personality that connects with my interviewer certainly didn't hurt. My path was a successful one. Hopefully, this may help you to start an equally successful path. Needless to say, it is extremely rewarding to apply one's artistic skill during a composite session to catch the "bad guys."

Story 1: "Mob Hit"

An interesting situation happened a few years later. It demonstrates the degree of difficulty and competition for such a position within a large department. There was a mob hit of a man from Staten Island, a borough in New York City. A wise guy was gunned down one evening in his car while it was parked in his driveway. It was a

Man found slain in B'klyn identified as mob figure

By LARRY CELONA and JERRY CAPECI
Daily News Staff Writers

A Staten Island man found slain in Brooklyn was identified yesterday as a mob associate who had been wounded earlier this year in the bloody Colombo family war, law enforcement officials revealed.

Steven Mancusi, 36, whose body was discovered Wednesday, was apparently killed a week ago and left in a car that had been stolen Oct. 1,

Fig. 1.3 *New York Daily News* article

noted news story in the papers the next day (Fig. 1.3). One of the first lines of the article stated, "Steve Mancusi, known mobster, was killed in his car late last night." It went on to give further details of the incident. In addition to his name, his basic human pedigree closely matched mine. The office got a kick out of it. However, I wasn't expecting the phone call that I received later in the morning. A police officer who wanted to get into the Artist Unit called. She was inquiring if I was dead and was there now an opening in the unit. Much to her dismay, I informed her I was very much alive and, unfortunately for her, there was not an opening. The next artist position did not become available for many years. Sometimes timing is everything.

Composite Art

Composite art is an unusual marriage of two unlikely disciplines: police investigative work and art. The cop-artist, almost an oxymoron, possesses both skills. The artist must create a quality facial drawing with assured confidence. The purpose of this sketch is to successfully gather, interpret, and illustrate the information obtained from the victim's memory. This sketch will be a drawing that merges many elements into one graphic image—hence, a *composite*. It is essential to realize that a composite sketch is a drawing of a victim's or witness's perception of a perpetrator at the time he or she was observed. It is not meant to be an exact portrait of the suspect. Keep the two words "likeness" and "similarity" in mind at all times. This is the best a composite sketch can achieve. Unlike most forensic sciences, in forensic art, almost *is* good enough.

All composite sketches are done during a *composite session*. A session involves drawing and interviewing. Though drawing is a vital part of the session, the real challenge lies in the ability to interview the victim or witness. The structure and continuity of the session are extremely crucial. The artist must develop a technique that effectively involves a victim or witness into the creation of a suspect sketch.

One method that helps to achieve this during the composite session is the technique of drawing the sketch in three stages. The first is the *proportion stage*. It is a basic line drawing that lays out the relationship and position of the individual facial features. Just as a building cannot be constructed without a foundation, the same goes for the composite sketch. The proportions are the foundation. In fact, many individuals look the way they do because of their unique proportions. The composite then enters a second stage, which is the *characteristic stage*. This is the drawing of the shapes of the facial features described by the victim. This is also the stage when the artist is working the most closely with the victim. The final stage is the *rendering stage*. The artist will render the sketch clearly and distinctly according to the information that was described and illustrated. "Clear" and "distinct" are also two important words to keep in mind when rendering a composite sketch. The composite sketch is not meant to be photographic, but rather an illustration of the information gathered during the session. Understanding these stages and terminologies will help you conduct your composite session (Fig. 1.4).

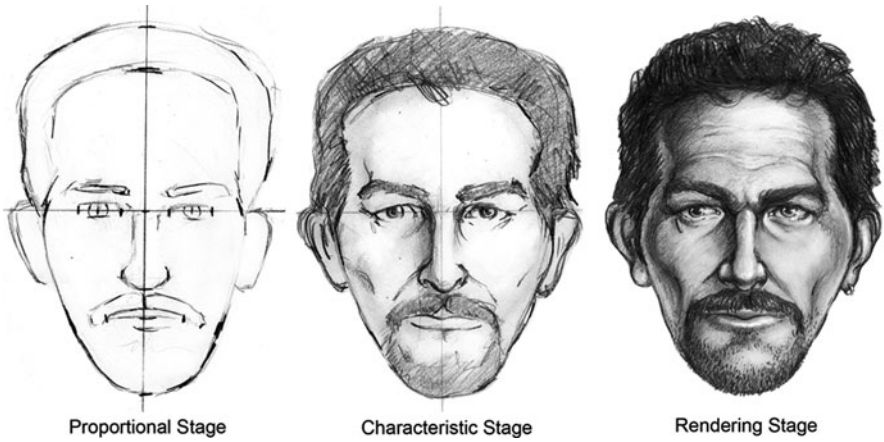

Fig. 1.4 The three stages of a composite sketch

Before exploring this method fully, let's examine the artistic appearance of a composite sketch. When drawing a portrait or a caricature of a subject, the artist will have either the person or images of the person in front of him or her (Figs. 1.5 and 1.6). The artist knows what the outcome is going to be and can sketch accordingly. In many ways, these artistic interpretations can look more like a subject than a photograph might. Especially with caricatures, illustrating one extreme feature, such as Jimmy Durante's nose, can achieve a great likeness. Unfortunately, the composite artist does not have an image of the subject in front of him or her while working. The composite artist needs to rely on the verbal description supplied by the witness. Thus, the look of a composite sketch will range from a portrait-type drawing to a caricature-type sketch, unfortunately never achieving either (Fig. 1.7). Understanding this limitation will help your composite sketching implementation.

Fig. 1.5 Pencil study of Humphrey Bogart

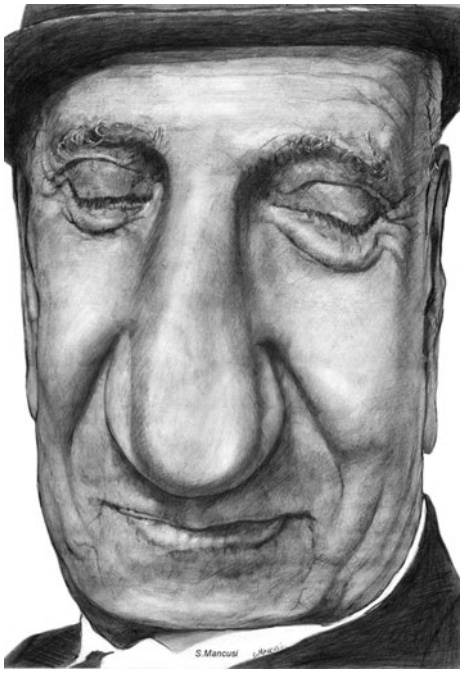

Fig. 1.6 Caricature of Jimmy Duranté

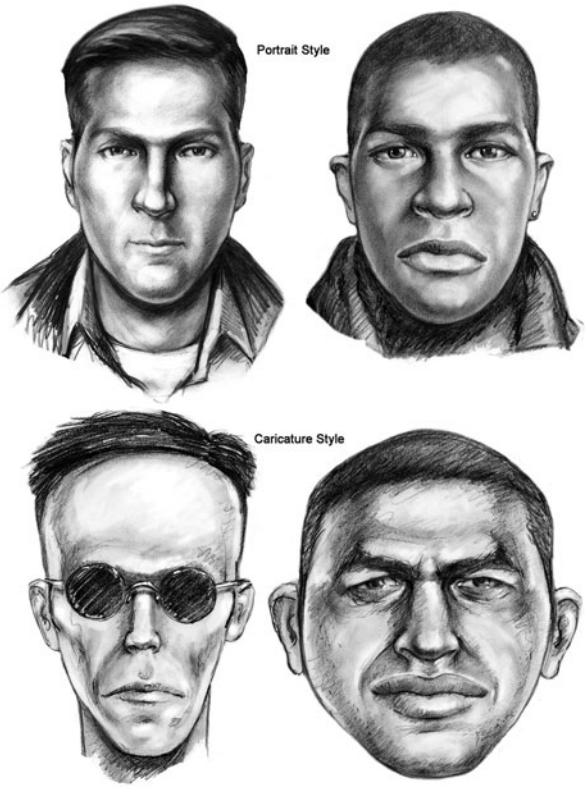

Fig. 1.7 Portrait- and caricature-style composite sketches

Basic Composite Sketch Case Study: "A Serial Rapist"

Sometime in 1994, a woman comes home from work in the Stuyvesant Town neighborhood in lower Manhattan. This is an apartment complex consisting of many buildings. It is not generally known as a dangerous area. She is an intelligent businesswoman in her 30s. It is late afternoon but still light outside. She enters her building, goes up the elevator, and walks down her hallway to her apartment. She feels she is in the safest place she could be. As she approaches the door to her apartment, she is unaware that there is an unknown man inside. He had broken into her apartment earlier through a window. As she enters, the man attacks her. He sexually assaults her. This is not an isolated incident. This suspect has attacked before. He is a serial rapist who has committed similar crimes in Manhattan on other occasions. However, this victim was the first to get a direct look at the front of his face. A sexual crime in New York City is handled by the Special Victims Squad of the NYPD's Detective Bureau. In the normal course of their investigation, detectives