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# FORENSIC SCULPTURE WORKSHOP

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NEW YORK ACADEMY OF ART

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# FORENSIC SCULPTURE WORKSHOP

The New York Academy of Art's Forensic Sculpture Workshop, created in 2015, is the result of a unique partnership between the Academy and the New York City Office of the Medical Examiner, in which art students used skulls from actual "cold cases" to recreate the faces of the victims, in the hope of identifying unknown persons.

For the week-long sculpture course, Academy students each receive a replica of the skull from a real unidentified body, and use their sculptural and artistic training to accurately reconstruct the face of the victim in clay, under the instruction of Joe Mullins, a forensic imaging specialist. Bradley J. Adams, the director of forensic anthropology for the Office of the New York City Medical Examiner, called clay facial reconstructions the "last-ditch effort" to identify unknown homicide victims, after methods such as fingerprinting, dental records and DNA testing fail to yield results. Nationally, thousands of skeletal remains await identification. The pilot program at the Academy in 2015 marked the first time the Office of the Medical Examiner had ever attempted this project with an art school, and resulted in 11 busts created from New York City skeletal remains and one positive identification. In 2016, the program was expanded from New York to include skulls from a variety of cold cases all over the country, from Delaware to California, and included two 19th-century skulls from unknown soldiers killed during the Civil War. In 2018, students in the course worked on skulls recovered in the Arizona desert belonging to unidentified migrants who died of exposure while crossing the US-Mexico border.

The New York Academy of Art is the national leader in teaching contemporary figurative art and its students follow a rigorous technical course of anatomical drawing, écorché and drawing from life. This specific artistic training allows Academy students to actively interpret the landscape of a skull and skillfully portray features and flesh.



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## PRESS

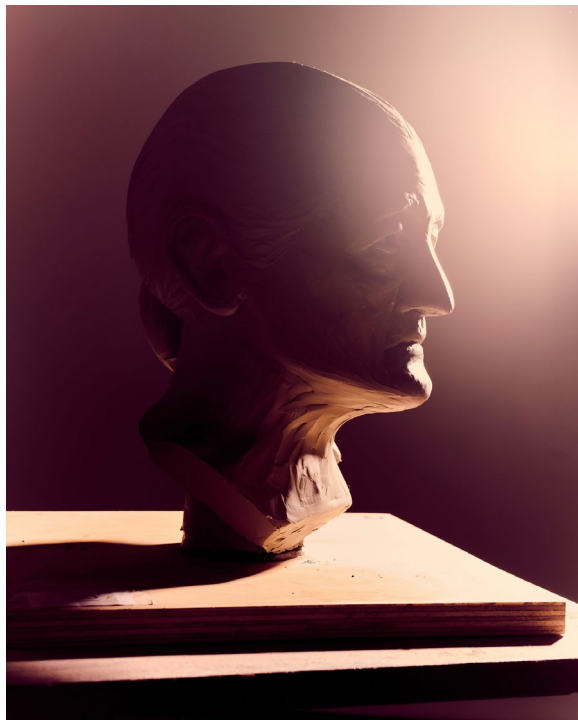
**2018** | **The New York Times**  
**The Guardian**  
**NPR All Things Considered**  
**Smithsonian Magazine**  
**The Washington Post**  
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**Arizona Republic**  
**Le Journal des Arts**  
**ABC 7 New York**

# The New York Times

## They Died Near the Border. Art Students Hope to Bring Them Back.

At the New York Academy of Art, facial reconstruction — fusing art and science — may help identify the missing, including migrants.

by PATRICIA LEIGH BROWN Friday, March 2, 2018



Above, Madison Haws recreated the face of an unidentified woman found in Queens. The hope is that someone who knew her will notify the authorities. Vincent Tullo for The New York Times

The final moments of life for the eight border crossers whose remains were found in the Arizona desert over the last two summers will always be a mystery. What is clear is the cause of death for them, as for many migrants, recorded by the Pima County medical examiner's office: "Heat stroke, exposure to hot environment." "Hyperthermia due to exposure to the elements." "Dehydration, hypotension and hyperthermia due to environmental exposure to heat in desert." The list goes on.

The desolation of their deaths in this perilous corridor along the border is compounded by another indignity: The identities of these eight men remained

unknown. The traditional tools used by medical examiners to identify human remains, including DNA and dental comparisons, had yet to yield any clues.

Now, a last-ditch effort to identify the dead and help bring closure to their families, has moved from the medical examiner's office in Tucson to a more rarefied setting: a workshop in facial reconstruction at the New York Academy of Art.

The class, taught by Joe Mullins, a forensic artist with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, focuses on reconstructing the faces of migrants who lost their lives in the desert. The workshop reflects the growing sophistication of the field of forensic facial reconstruction — a fusion of science, art and anthropology in which the skull is used to build a face and to help investigators identify the dead. It is particularly helpful in cases of crime or mass disasters.

Young graduate students, whose rigorous classical training includes anatomy, are working with 3-D-printed replicas of the men's skulls based on CT-scans of the originals, which are considered forensic evidence.

Painstakingly rendered in clay applied onto the copied skulls, with marbles for eyes and a black Sharpie dot marking the pupils, the students' reconstructions are being exhibited in the academy windows through March 29.

"We're visual creatures," said Bruce Anderson, a forensic anthropologist with the Pima County medical examiner's office. "When we don't have a viewable face," because of decomposition, Dr. Anderson said, "we ask artists to give us the impression of what the person looked like in order to draw attention to a particular case." The academy reconstructions have

been posted on NamUs, the National Institute of Justice's National Missing and Unidentified Persons System.

The class comes at a sobering juncture. Migrant deaths along the United States border with Mexico rose last year despite a steep decrease in attempted crossings, according to the United Nations Migration Agency. Since 2001, the remains of roughly 2,800 migrants have been found in Pima County alone, represented by a grim sea of red circles on "death maps" produced by the Arizona OpenGIS Initiative for Deceased Migrants.

Of these, roughly 1,000 people are still unidentified. Stricter border enforcement and deportation policies have led migrants to cross at more remote and brutal terrain.

"Anyone who spends regular time in this landscape does so with the knowledge of the scale of death and dying," said Robin Reineke, the co-founder and executive director of the Colibri Center for Human Rights in Tucson, an advocacy organization that reports on missing migrants and conducts DNA searches. "It's shocking given the silence our country maintains on this issue."

Remains are often scattered by vultures and other scavengers, which can pick a body clean in a matter of days. "If there is one thing more dangerous than crossing the Sonoran Desert with a smuggler, it's crossing by yourself," Dr. Anderson said.

To a trained eye, the complex structure of the human skull offers a blueprint to the facial features of the deceased. "A skull is the foundation an individual's face is built on," said Mr. Mullins, 47. "It's like a house for your face."

The class began by analyzing clues: The thickness of the lips, the shape and placement of the eyes, nose and chin, the earlobes, even the curve of the eyebrows are all revealed in the skull.

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Forensic reconstruction experts like Mr. Mullins, who specializes in age progression — for example, how a missing child might look years later — seek out distinguishing features, such as scars, a broken nose, or, in one case, braces on the teeth.

He cautions students to leave artistic license at the door. “You have to have that artistic mojo flowing through your veins,” he tells them. “But if you put the wrong face on, that person is going to stay lost.”

Reconstructing a face with scientific accuracy involves rebuilding the muscles and soft tissue layer by layer, using strips of clay. Then the students use cut plastic straws placed on the clay to mark tissue depths, which are based on researchers’ averages for ages, genders and cultural backgrounds. Antonia Barolini, a 23-year-old painting specialist, said she chose the academy because of Mr. Mullins’s class, having dreamed about being an F.B.I. agent.

The skull she was working on had pronounced cheekbones, an uneven jawline and a distinct overbite. The man was 18 to 22 years old when he died, according to the Pima County medical examiner. “He was younger than me,” Ms. Barolini observed. “That part was real hard.”

The class, in its fourth year, grew out of a working relationship between Mr. Mullins and Bradley J. Adams, director of forensic anthropology for the chief medical examiner’s office in New York City, which received a grant from the National Institute of Justice to purchase a 3-D printer. “Facial reconstructions are intended to provide an investigatory lead in cases that have gone cold,” Dr. Adams said. “The hope is that someone who knew the person will see the reconstruction, recognize some similarities and notify the authorities of a potential match.”

Not every skull can be traced to the desert, but many have chilling stories behind them. Madison Haws, 25, an academy painting student, was given an unidentified skull from New York that was recovered in a basement crawl space at a nursing home in Queens, since closed. The woman had lost her teeth, giving her a sunken appearance captured in Ms. Haws’s reconstruction. “Part of me is afraid she was abandoned,” Ms. Haws said. “I hope someone’s looking for her so that her bones will rest in peace.”

She and her colleagues join a line of artists using facial reconstruction, from the ancient Egyptian funerary or death masks used to cover the faces of mummies to anatomists like Gaetano Giulio Zumbo (1656-1701), who recreated facial muscles in wax over real skulls. The academy’s curriculum includes the art of *écorché*, making “flayed” or “skinned” sculpted figures with exposed muscles (the clay figures are somewhat gruesomely scattered about the students’ paint-splattered studios).

Karen T. Taylor, considered a dean of the profession and a consultant for the television show “CSI,” said the complexity of her rather esoteric occupa-

tion is often underestimated, with police personnel sometimes taking on the reconstruction instead of trained artists who work in tandem with anthropologists and odontologists. Among professionals, the balance between artistic skill and scientific standards continues to be debated.

“Practitioners without artistic skills produce less believable and realistic faces, and practitioners without scientific rigor produce faces that are inaccurate and unreliable,” Caroline Wilkinson, director of the School of Art & Design at Liverpool John Moores University in England, said by email. She leads a research-based “Face Lab” whose celebrity depictions have included Richard III, J.S. Bach, Ramesses II and Mary, Queen of Scots.

At the academy, as the faces created by students took shape, the room began to take on the feeling of a hallowed space. “It’s kind of eerie,” said Michael Fusco, 30, a student whose specialty is painting. “They become people.”

Two of the eight migrants wound up being identified independently of the class. But the desert still contains untold numbers of the missing. For Mr. Mullins, the class represents a potential to bring closure to loved ones of those who perished, perhaps while seeking a better life.

“It was a gamble that cost them their lives,” Mr. Mullins said. “But it shouldn’t have to cost them their identity.”



Some of the reconstructed faces made by students in a class at the New York Academy of Art are on view at the school.



Michael Fusco’s sketch book for his anatomy class at the New York Academy of Art.

**The  
Guardian**

### Artists' impressions: sculptors help to identify victims found on US-Mexico border

The remains of eight dead men have never been formally identified, so a group of New York artists have been called upon for help with facial reconstruction

Amanda Holpuch | 15 Jan 2018



The families of eight men found dead on the US border with Mexico do not know what happened to them. The men have not been identified but their skulls sit in the office of the medical examiner of Pima County, Arizona, about 70 miles north of the border.

This week, in a last-ditch effort to provide answers, artists at the New York Academy of Art sculpted facial reconstructions of the men – the first time an art school has done such forensic work on presumed migrants.

The students worked from 3D-printed copies of the skulls and with information available to the medical examiner: usually height, gender, nationality and age range. Each student used clay and other materials to reconstruct the face in front of them. The result was photographed and added to the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System, or NamUs.

“It’s like a God complex,” said one student, Kathleen Gallo. “This life and the lives of everyone who knew him are at stake.”

The unidentified men were just a small group of the 1,004 people found dead in Pima County since 2000 who have never been formally identified. Another 1,812 have since been given a name.

Such work is not easy. The students must accurately depict a once-living person, using only their skull. To do this, they follow basic rules of anatomy. For example, a small change of direction on the mastoid process, a bony projection behind the ear, indicates whether a person has detached or attached earlobes. A hairline notch in the nose can signify a deviated septum or injury; the span from the brow of the nose to its end is always the same as that from the top to the bottom of the ears.

Another student, Chris Page, said he operated under the mantra of a mentor: “You have to paint with ice water in your veins.”

‘Putting a face on a skull’

Page participated in the school’s first forensic sculpture class, in 2015, in which students reconstructed faces using unidentified remains from the New York medical examiner’s office.

Cases involving migrants found dead near the border are particularly hard to resolve. There is no central agency that collects information for all missing persons last seen crossing the US-Mexico border. Families may hesitate to contact authorities.

“If we can’t raise any other leads in any other way, then putting a face on a skull is usually a positive thing to do,” said the Pima County medical examiner, Bruce Anderson.

Most of those who die crossing the harsh desert terrain of the border are killed by dehydration, heat stroke or hypothermia. Bodies decay quickly in the heat and are picked over by animals and insects. If they are found, they are discovered by border patrol officer, hikers, humanitarian groups, ranchers and hunters.

“We provide answers to families,” Anderson said. “They are very painful answers, but they are answers owed to families. In our office here, we make no distinction between American citizens and foreign nationals in doing everything we can to identify a person and determine a cause of death.”

Facial reconstructions have always been time-consuming and expensive. But technology has created an opening.

The skulls worked on in New York were scanned at the medical examiner’s office in Arizona by a 3D tech company, Faro. The scans were then emailed to New York and a 3D printer belonging to the city medical examiner.

The facial reconstruction class, only available to advanced students, is taught by Joe Mullins, a forensic artist who has worked for 18 years at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and whose connections led to the partnership with Pima County.

Mullins used three previous classes to help clear skulls from the medical examiner’s shelves in New York. He hopes this year’s course will help do the same in Arizona.

“Just because they died trying to come here that doesn’t mean they should lose their identity,” he said.

By the fourth day of the five-day class, 3D scans had become fully formed faces. The room was silent, other than when Mullins consulted students on problems like unnaturally textured skin (the trick is to smooth it with the palm, not the fingers) and too-prominent eyebrows (don’t be afraid to aggressively scrape back the clay).

It was clear when a reconstruction is complete, Mullins said.

“I stop when I see someone staring back at me.”

### Cracking Cold Cases With Forensic Sculpture

Mar 22, 2018 · by Mara Silvers

Every spring semester, forensic sculpture students at the New York Academy of Art put their creative license aside in order to take on cold cases from the New York City Office of the Medical Examiner. Starting with skull replicas made by a 3-D printer, the students painstakingly recreate the faces of people whose names they may never know. The goal is to make the faces so realistic that a viewer could help identify someone who died long ago.

“We’re trying to limit our artistic license,” said student Michael Fusco, “to arrive at something that will not be exactly who that person was, or exactly what they looked like, but is close enough that it could trigger a recognition.”

This year, the Academy expanded their forensic efforts to work with officials in Pima County,

Arizona. They’re helping to reconstruct the faces of the roughly 1,000 unidentified people who have died while crossing the U.S.-Mexico border.

“We’re kind of the last resort,” said John Volk, Director of Continuing Studies at the school. If a person cannot be identified through DNA or dental records, Volk said, the medical examiner hopes someone will recognize a facial reconstruction.

“So really, this is the skeleton’s last chance to get identified,” Volk told WNYC’s Jami Floyd.

The forensic reconstructions from the 2018 workshop can be seen at the New York Academy of Art until March 29. Photos of the reconstructions will also be added on the website for the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs).







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## 2018 PRESS



Smithsonian

### To Help Identify Migrants Who Died Along Border, Art Class Reconstructs Their Faces

When DNA analysis and dental exams aren't possible, facial reconstruction is a last-resort to identifying remains  
By Julissa Treviño | March 9, 2018

Every year, hundreds of migrants traveling across the Mexican border die while attempting to cross into the United States. The conditions of Arizona, Texas and New Mexico, and the risky nature of the journey, can cause the individuals to die by heat stroke, hyperthermia due to exposure to the elements and dehydration.

Their bodies are not easy to identify. Though medical examiners try DNA and dental comparisons, many migrants go unidentified.

Recently, however, students at the New York Academy of Art helped a Tucson, Arizona, medical examiner's office take a step toward naming some of the nameless by reconstructing the faces of eight migrants.

As Patricia Leigh Brown reports for The New York Times, the workshop, taught by forensic artist Joe Mullins of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, is part of a pilot program recreating faces from the remains of the individuals who were discovered in the desert.

According to Brown, CT-scans of migrants' skulls were used to create 3D-printed replicas. The New York Academy of Art students, who are trained in anatomy, used whatever context they might know from the Pima County medical examiner, like an estimate of the migrant's age, to rebuild the person's muscles and soft tissue layer with clay. Tissue depths, which the students marked using cut plastic straws placed on the clay, were based on researchers' guesses for age, gender and cultural background.

The reconstructions have marbles for eyes and a marker to dot the pupils.

The project is part of the growing field of forensic facial reconstruction, which combines science, art and anthropology to help solve crimes or mass disasters.

According to the press release, the New York Academy of Art course was created in 2015 in a partnership with the New York City Office of the Medical Examiner. In its first year, student created 11 busts from New York City skeletal remains, resulting in one positive identification. In 2016, the program expanded to include skulls from cold cases around the country.

Facial reconstruction as a means of identifying lost persons is not a new art. In fact, the first scientific reconstructions date back to 1895, when German anatomist Wilhem His modeled a bust onto the plaster cast of the skull of Johann Sebastian Bach. Soon after, in 1916, an unidentified skeleton found in a Brooklyn residence was confirmed as the remains of a man named Domenico La Rosa after an artist, using a medium called "plastelina"—where colored plasticine was molded over the bones of the face—allowed the sister of the missing person to identify La Rosa's remains.

The technique has come a long way since then, with today's reconstructions achieving incredibly lifelike results. While reconstructions are often employed by forensic specialists, they're also used by archaeologists hoping to better under-

stand early humans. This January, for instance, the reconstructed face of an 18-year-old woman who lived some 9,000 years ago was unveiled at Greece's Acropolis Museum.

In forensic use, new 3D technology has minimized degrees of errors, researchers have found. When DNA and dental exams fail and a face can't be identified due decay, that's when facial reconstruction steps in.

While facial reconstruction is a last-resort for identifying unknown persons, it's nevertheless an important resource. According to the press release, there are currently thousands of skeletal remains waiting identification.

As it happens, two of the eight migrants student reconstructed have already been identified independent of the project thanks to DNA tests and family members. For the other six reconstructions created by the class, they just might provide the recognition someone needs to identify a body and bring some closure to those the individual left behind.



### The Washington Post

#### NY art students mold clay into faces of dead, nameless migrants

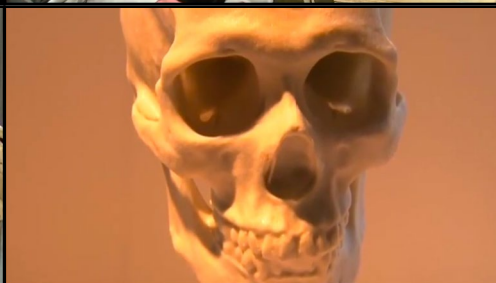
New York Academy of Art students mold busts from 3D printed skulls of migrants who died trying to cross the border from Mexico into the U.S.



Cappasity



KRISTEN PEDOTE  
New York Academy of Art student





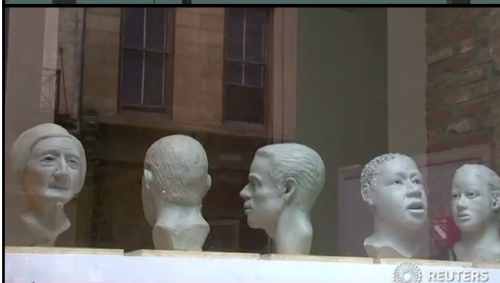
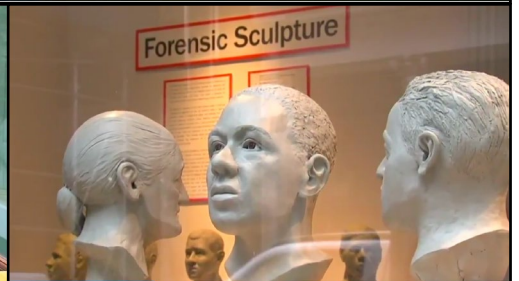
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### USA TODAY

#### NY art students mold clay into faces of dead, nameless migrants

New York Academy of Art students mold busts from 3D printed skulls of migrants who died trying to cross the border from Mexico into the U.S.





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### Students recreate the faces of dead migrants at the border





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### THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

## Pima County, New York Academy of Art partnership brings art, science together to help identify dead migrants

It can be difficult to identify the remains of migrants found near the U.S.-Mexico border, but a collaborative project that combines art with science is trying to change that.

As part of the project, art students in New York receive replica skulls of deceased migrants who remain unidentified. They then “use their sculptural and artistic training to accurately reconstruct the face of the victim in clay,” according to the organizers with the New York Academy of Art.

The project, in partnership with the Pima County medical examiner, aims to help identify migrants who died near the Mexico border in Arizona by increasing the chance that someone will recognize the deceased

Without identification, the bodies can't be returned to families and authorities can't get accurate data on border deaths.

The Arizona initiative is new, but the workshop formed in 2015 to help solve cold cases in New York.

“This was simply an opportunity to exercise their skills in anatomy and sculpture,” said John Volk, director of Continuing Studies at the school.

After reading a report about migrant deaths in The New York Times, Volk felt the workshop needed to spread its reach.

He asked the New York City Medical Examiner's Office to reach out to Pima County.

“As artists, we just work in our studios,” said Volk. “To have the opportunity to help our community directly was a huge interest to our students.” Data from Cochise, Pima, Pinal, Santa Cruz counties

Because the remains are considered evidence, the students in New York didn't work with the actual skulls of the migrants, Volk said. Instead, the students worked with 3-D prints of the skulls.

FARO, a Florida-based 3-D imaging company, used high-tech scanning equipment to capture data from 10 skulls and sent it to the students in New York. There, a 3-D printer re-created the skulls of eight of the migrants.

The data contained information on migrants who died in Pima, Pinal, Santa Cruz and Cochise counties in the summers of 2016 and 2017.

“Our office has had consistently 30 or 40 skulls of unidentified men who are thought to be migrants or smugglers,” said Pima County Medical Examiner Bruce Anderson. The

number of migrants found dead along the border increased in 2017, despite fewer migrants illegally crossing, according to the United Nations.

“I feel it is my obligation to pass on what I've learned to others and hopefully inspire other artists to lend their talents to helping these victims get their names back.” Forensic specialist Joe Mullins

An exact number of migrant deaths along the border is almost impossible to determine, a USA Today Network report concluded last year.

Anderson said his office was able to identify more than 99 percent of U.S. citizens from 2000 to 2017. Fifty-five bodies out of the more than 38,000 his office examined during that time were not identified.

Migrants, however, who often have relatives and records in a different country, are more difficult to identify. Pima County identified 64 percent of suspected migrant cases from 2000 to 2017, Anderson said.

During that time, his office examined 2,816 suspected migrants who died crossing the border in Arizona and identified 1,812 of them, he said.

Forensic specialist Joe Mullins instructed the students. Mullins has worked for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children as an artist for 18 years.

“I feel it is my obligation to pass on what I've learned to others and hopefully inspire other artists to lend their talents to helping these victims get their names back,” said Mullins.

Anthropologists are able to determine the age, ancestry, gender of a person by assessing the skull. Once an assessment is performed, the information and a 3-D print is given to the artist.

Students faced challenges when creating the forensic sculptures.

“The challenge is to put the correct face back on the skull,” said Mullins. “Each skull is unique, and the students have to follow the details of what the skull is telling them, to make sure they sculpt the face that goes with the skull to help spark recognition.”

The Pima County Medical Examiner's Office hopes to find more ways to help identify remains of migrants.

“We can do a better job at identifying, if we all work together,” said Anderson.

The sculptures are on display at the New York Academy of Art until March 29.

Lauren Castle, The Republic | [azcentral.com](http://azcentral.com)



(Photo: Emily J. Mullins/New York Academy of Art)

LeJournal  
desArts.fr

### In New York, an art school recreates the faces of deceased migrants

The New York Academy of Art exhibits sculptures made from the skulls of deceased migrants on the Mexico-US border.  
Par Capucine Moulas, Le 27 mars 2018

New York. In the great sculpture studio of the New York Academy of Art, humanity is laid bare. Literally. Skulls, tendons, muscles, bodies in flesh, boards of anatomy ... Here, each of the 110 students of art school nestled in Lower Manhattan breaks, skin and recompose the body for six months to learn human anatomy. Among these autopsied sculptures, fifteen faces of clay stand out from the others. Men and women of all ages, some chubby, others more angular. These faces exposed during the month of March belonged to fifteen people who have died today, including eight dead migrants on the border between Mexico and the United States.

In 2017, 412 migrants succumbed to the perilous crossing between the two countries, according to a UN survey. John Volks, director of continuing education at the New York Academy of Art, is behind the forensic reconstruction program. "Last summer, I was reading an article in the New York Times about all those people who are dying in the deserts of Arizona, Texas or Mexico crossing the border," he says in his voice. I thought it must be very hard for these families who see one of them go to build a better life and who never have news, who do not know what happened to him. So I thought it would be an opportunity for our students to help identify these dead people. "

Every year since 2015, the school has offered a one-week workshop for student volunteers to help the New York Medical Examiner's office reconstruct faces from recovered skeletons whose DNA is not registered.

"A number painting exercise"

"They can not give us the original skulls because they are exhibits in homicide investigations. The medical examiner scans the skulls and duplicates them with a 3D printer," says John Volks. This year, eight migrant skulls were selected from the many records of Pima County in Arizona. How do you go about finding a face?

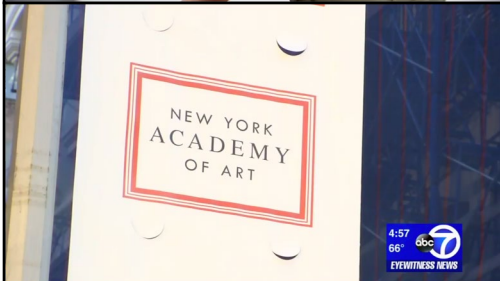
Each skull has an identity, says Joe Mullins, the forensic imaging expert who leads the class. "You have to follow the skull and listen to what it says about the face that corresponds to it," he professes. Students first place the muscles and then markers to identify the depth of the tissue. They then build the skin and finally add eyes (all brown) and hair. "We must contain all artistic freedom. This class is a bit like a number painting exercise: follow the instructions to get an image. It's a course to carve the good face in the hope that it will be recognized," insists the expert. These sculptures, a new generation of the portrait-robot, are then photographed and published on the official website of the missing persons in the United States, "NamUs.gov". So far, only one of these faces has been recognized in 2015 by a cousin of the victim. John Volks takes a look at the busts. "We are the last resort to identify these people. "



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# FORENSIC SCULPTURE WORKSHOP

## 2018 PRESS





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**2016** | **The New York Post**  
**Metro New York**  
**CNN**  
**New York 1 News**  
**The Art Newspaper**  
**People Magazine**  
**Public Radio International**



# FORENSIC SCULPTURE WORKSHOP

## 2016 PRESS



### THEY WENT TO ART SCHOOL BUT THEY MIGHT END UP SOLVING MURDERS

By Sophia Rosenbaum  
March 14, 2016 | 3:25pm



This is some killer art!

Big Apple art students are using their sculpting skills to help solve cold-case murders across the country. The exhibit includes 15 clay busts created by NY Academy of Art students and the New York City Office of Chief Medical Examiner.

The New York Academy of Art teamed up with the New York City Office of Chief Medical Examiner to create 15 facial reconstructions of murder victims whose deaths have never been solved.

"It's not an exact replica of the person, but hopefully they're close enough that someone will say, 'Oh, that looks like Uncle So-and-So,'" said John Volk, who created the five-day forensic sculpture workshop. "When there are no medical records, the forensic reconstruction is the last chance."

Last year's workshop led to the successful identification of one victim after a woman came forward and said she recognized a family member from a story about the initiative, which digs into the country's enormous backlog of cold cases. No details about that case were released.

"It's a huge problem so it was a great opportunity for us to help out," Volk said, noting that there are at least 1,200 unidentified skulls in New York's system alone.

Officials provided as much detail as possible — including age, ethnicity and hair type — and then each student was given a 3D printed copy of the skull. Students carve clay replicating the faces of murder victims from unsolved cases.

This year's skulls include two from men who fought in the Civil War who were discovered in Virginia and South Carolina in the late 1800s, as well as six from the New York metro area.

The most recent discovery included in the project was a skeletonized body of a middle-aged black male with good teeth who was found off the Belt Parkway in 2015.

Others include a teenage girl who was found fully clothed — wearing a leather jacket, purple sweater and jeans — behind a power plant in Queens in 1994 and a 40-to-60-year old male with a gray beard found behind a building in 1999 in the Bronx.

Volk said it usually takes about three days for the artist's to sculpt the busts.

"It's always so strange to walk in the room. All of a sudden, it's much more quiet and it's no longer just 15 artists — it's 30 people in the room," he said.

The artwork is now on display through March 23 at the art academy's headquarters in Tribeca.

Volk said he's received a lot of positive feedback from the students about the workshop, which he said could expand into a full 15-week course available for the New York Academy's master's candidates.

"They're using their sculpture skills and their knowledge of anatomy to help the community so it's very satisfying for them," he said. "Some of them have actually talked about pursuing this as a career."



# FORENSIC SCULPTURE WORKSHOP

## 2016 PRESS



## NYC ART STUDENTS RECONSTRUCT FACES USING SKULLS FROM REAL COLD CASES

said John Volk, director of the school's Continuing Studies Program.

Through the direction of Joe Mullins — who teaches the workshop — the students are asked to select a skull and are then given details on each victim. Some of the details include age range, where the body was found, anything that was left with the body, a guess on gender, and more. Then, through five days in mid January, the students begin to form the faces, using the knowledge they already gained through classes at the school such as anatomical drawing and écorché — where students sculpt a body from bone to muscles.

“When you walk in and you’ve come from 15 people to now there is 30 people in the room at the same time it’s a very strange and eerie kind of feeling,” Volk said. “And now [the skulls] are no longer an abstract idea, this is somebody.”

This year, the replica of the skulls — which were created through a 3D printer — came from cold cases all over the country such as Delaware and California, along with six cases from the New York metro area.

For first-year student Allison Hill-Edgar the idea of building faces out of just a skull seemed impossible. However as each day went by, the impossible slowly transformed into an amazing possibility. “When we got to the end of the class and everyone had these vastly different people staring back at them I was completely amazed. I was blown away,” Hill-Edgar said.

The painting major, who never dabbled in sculpting before, added that she waited until the rest of her classmates selected a skull and took the last one on the table.

To her surprise, the skull she picked came with a unique history. The skull belonged to a member of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry, the first all-African-American civil war regiment. And although she said she initially

wanted to recreate the face of a cold case victim, she was always fascinated about the story of the regiment and this felt like helping form a part of history.

“To be able to put a face for someone that was unidentified, that was so cool,” she said.

Hill-Edgar, who used to be a doctor, said she utilized her medical background to understanding the anatomy behind the reconstruction and said she helped her classmates when questions came up. She added that during the last day many of the students took the time to make sure details matched the information they were given because unlike other art projects — where they are given the freedom to express themselves creatively — this assignment had more meaning to each piece.

“Each day there was a step that we added, so it was wild to watch them come alive,” Hill-Edgar said. “Doing it right was very important. I think we all felt a certain amount of responsibility.”

The face models will be on view in the windows of the school facing Franklin Street until March 23.

Once the exhibition is over, the models will be photographed and uploaded to Name Us, a website which is maintained by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, with the hope that someone will recognize a face and possibly give an identity to a victim.

“It was just really rewarding to be a part of the art world being able to help people,” Volk said. “It’s like instant gratification.”

Angy Altamirano  
Reporter  
March 14, 2016

A group of New York City students have used the power of art to help finally give a face to some unknown homicide victims — and opened the door to one day finding out their stories.

Starting this month, the New York Academy of Art, at 111 Franklin St. in Manhattan, is hosting an exhibition of clay models and featuring the work of students from the school's Forensic Sculpture Workshop who recreated the faces of unidentified victims from real cold cases. Through the workshop — which is a partnership between the graduate school and the New York City Office of the Medical Examiner — 15 students were each given a replica of a skull of an unknown individual and asked to recreate the face of the victim.

This is the second year the graduate school has partnered with the medical examiner. Students first reconstructed faces a year ago for 11 victims — one who later was a positively identified and another who is currently in the process of being identified. “This is very exciting because it is very fun to do for the students but you recognize that you are doing a service for someone and there is the possibility that you can help someone,”

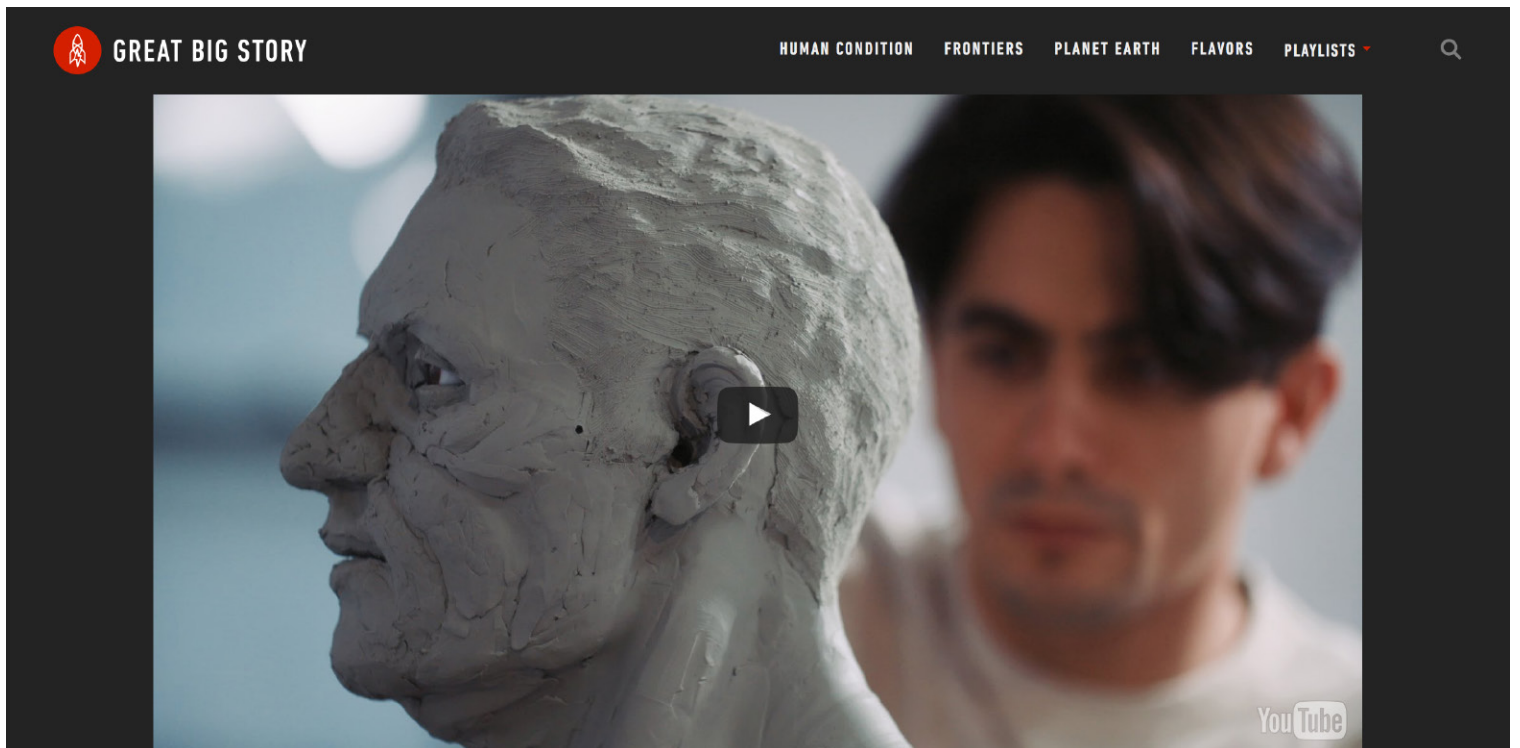


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# FORENSIC SCULPTURE WORKSHOP

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## 2016 PRESS



## **From Cold Case to Positive ID: An Art Class Helps Uncover Victims**

The Forensic Sculpture Workshop at the New York Academy of Art pairs sculpture students with skulls from actual cold cases. Their mission is to create clay busts, which are then used to identify unknown murder victims.

# FORENSIC SCULPTURE WORKSHOP

## 2016 PRESS



## Students Sculpt and Help Solve Crimes at New York Academy of Art Workshop

By Stephanie Simon

Monday, March 14, 2016 at 12:51 PM EDT

NY1 VIDEO: Iggy Pop posing nude for a drawing class at The New York Academy of Art recently caused quite a stir and raised a few eyebrows in the art world and beyond. However, there's another art class at the academy that is even more of a "mystery." NY1's Stephanie Simon explains in this Arts and Culture report.

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# FORENSIC SCULPTURE WORKSHOP

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## 2016 PRESS



INTERNATIONAL EDITION  
**THE ART NEWSPAPER**

### **Student sculptors revive the faces of cold-case victims**

**Forensic busts based on 3D printed skulls have led to at least one positive DNA identification**

by **GABRIELLA ANGELETI** | 4 April 2016

The New York Academy of Art (NYAA) in the Tribeca neighbourhood of Manhattan relaunched a five-day forensic sculpture workshop where students produce clay model busts of cold-case murder victims by using 3-D printed, plaster replicas of their skulls. The class has proven so popular that John Volk, the director of the continuing studies programme at the school, told the New York Post last month that he hopes to expand the workshop into a 15-week course that will be available to school's Master students.

The university first partnered with the New York City Office of Chief Medical Examiner last year and provided the students with 11 skulls and all the victims' known forensic and biographical information including age, height, race, hair type and points of bludgeoning. The sculpted busts were displayed on the windows of the university "in a last-ditch effort to identify unknown homicide victims, after methods such as fingerprinting, dental records and DNA testing failed to yield results", Bradley J. Adams, the director of forensic anthropology for the Office of the City Medical Examiner, said in a press release.

Last year, one of the skulls led to a positive DNA identification, and the match was further confirmed by a family member of the subject. "Someone saw a photo of [a bust] and contacted us to say that they believed it was their relative", Angharad Coates, the director of communications at the NYAA, told The Art Newspaper, "Cases like this show the intensive anatomical training that we offer to our students."

This year, the students in the workshop produced 15 busts. The skulls came from a variety of cold-case cases around the US. Two of the skulls belonged to men who fought in the civil war and were discovered in the late 1800s, while six came from the New York metro area, including one that belonged to a middle-aged black male found in 2015 off the Belt Parkway highway that connects Brooklyn and Queens.

The busts took around three days to complete, and were displayed on the windows of the university that face Franklin Street last month. Images of the finished busts will be added to the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUS) online database, and will be available to the New York City Police Department.

# FORENSIC SCULPTURE WORKSHOP

## 2016 PRESS

# People

### New York Art Students Create 3-D Renderings from Skulls to Help Identify Unknown Murder Victims

At this very moment, in medical examiners' offices all across America, the skulls of tens of thousands of anonymous homicide victims sit in evidence boxes, waiting to be identified.

Each of those skulls is tied to a detective – haunted by the enduring mysteries surrounding that unknown person's death – as well as fractured families who are clinging to shreds of hope that their missing loved ones are still alive.

To make a dent in the backlog of unidentified skulls, investigators need to think outside the box. That's where Joe Mullins, a forensic artist who works with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, comes in: Mullins has teamed up with graduate students at the New York Academy of Art, who use the skulls and whatever police clues exist – about the victim's age and race, for instance – to create 3-D facial models out of clay to help make identifications.

"These people have lost their identities and we want to give it back to them," Mullins tells PEOPLE. "These skulls are people who are frozen in uncertainty. They are somebody's son, somebody's nephew – someone's relative.

There's got to be someone out there wondering where this person is, what became of them. Someone has questions and we're trying to provide them with answers."

Last summer in Boston, artists helped provide answers about "Baby Doe," an unidentified 2-year-old whose decomposed body was found washed up on an area beach.

Desperate for leads after three months, investigators contacted the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in Virginia, where a forensic artist was charged with reconstructing the toddler's face. The artist's rendering was released to media outlets and within two weeks, was shared by more than 50 million people on social media.

That facial reconstruction, according to Mullins, helped identify the victim as Bella Bond, leading to the arrests of her mother and the mother's boyfriend in her death.

"Bella Bond was such an innocent, young victim and that captured everyone's attention," Mullins offers. "There are lots of other cases just like hers; thousands, in fact. They all deserve 50 million views, too." Student Artist: 'It's About Helping People Find Closure' Mullins' workshop shows that there are practical uses for the students' creative skills, says Angharad Coates, the school's communications director.

"For these projects, the students are purely relying on science and anatomy, and have to avoid artistic freedom," Coates tells PEOPLE. "They use the classical sculpting techniques taught here to help identify these people, and it's the one project they can't keep – because it becomes evidence."



Adds Coates, "The students never lose sight of the fact that they're working on a real person," she explains.

Last year, student Marco Palli was able to help bring closure to the family of Daniel Miranda. In 2004, work crews found the young Hispanic man's remains while cleaning a Brooklyn highway.

Miranda's body was found wrapped in a blanket, and for years, police tried to identify his skeleton. While DNA evidence ultimately helped police put a name to the skull, Palli's reconstructive work helped Miranda's family process his death.

"It becomes personal for you after a little while and you just want to help this person," Palli comments to PEOPLE. "During this workshop, it's not about making a great sculpture. It's about helping people find closure and it's really enriching – not in the artistic sense but in the social spectrum."

The busts the students recently created will be displayed online and in what Mullins calls "a portrait gallery with purpose." Mullins says he is hopeful someone will see the newest images and recognize one of the faces.

Mullins is interested in expanding the program to other art schools across the country, he says.

"When people realize these busts are unidentified homicide victims, these sculptures will have a deeper impact," Mullins explains. "People realize they're not looking at works of art, but people – victims."

By Chris Harris @chrisharrisment  
02/01/2016 AT 11:30 AM EST

# FORENSIC SCULPTURE WORKSHOP



**PRI** Public Radio International



## How art school students are helping solve cold cases

John Volk started a forensic art workshop for his students at the New York Academy of Art because he thought it would help them hone their skills in sculpture and anatomy. Now those students are helping the City of New York solve cold cases.

"It's a beautiful and really kind of an eerie process" Volk tells Brent Bambury of Day 6.

Each student in the Forensic Art Workshop receives a replica skull from the New York Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. Then over the next five days, students use clay to reconstruct the faces of their unknown victims.

"When the students walk, the very first thing they're told is to check their artistic license at the door."

Volk says paying attention to the skull's shape, its DNA and tissue depth are all key elements in getting the face right.

Last year one student's facial reconstructions was recognised by the victim's aunt, after she saw a picture of it in the New York Times.

"She was a little flabbergasted," says Volk. "Her nephew had been missing for quite a while."

Because of the growing interest in the Forensic Art Workshop, Volk is considering making it a fifteen week course.

He says students like exploring the forensics, working as a team on the investigation and definitely want to give back to the community.

"We always take leadership in our community. We always want to make a difference."

Allison Hill-Edgar took part in this year's Forensic Art Workshop at the New York Academy of Art.

Hear Allison talk about participating in the workshop and the man whose face she reconstructed.

She reconstructed the skull of a Civil War soldier from the 54th Regiment of the Union Army, the first free African American unit in the country.



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# FORENSIC SCULPTURE WORKSHOP

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## PRESS

**2015** | **The New York Times**  
**Hyperallergic**  
**The Huffington Post**  
**CBS Evening News**  
**The Times of London**



# FORENSIC SCULPTURE WORKSHOP

## 2015 PRESS

### The New York Times *Through Art and Forensics, Faces of Unidentified Victims Emerge*

By COREY KILGANNON JAN. 20, 2015



Anyone who walked into Room 501 at the New York Academy of Art in Tri-BeCa the other day would have seen a roomful of sculpture students molding clay into faces that looked nearly alive.

But the people represented by the sculptures had all met ugly deaths and were found as skeletons in desolate places across New York City — train tracks, wooded areas, in a basement.

Most of the bodies bore various violent clues, including dismemberment, bullets to the head and other blunt force trauma, the instructor, Joe Mullins, told the art students. The bodies all had one thing in common.

“They lost their identity,” said Mr. Mullins, a forensic imaging specialist. “We’re going to give it back to them.”

That was the point of a weeklong workshop this month in which fine art students tried to give faces to 11 unidentified crime victims found over the years who were now being handled by the city medical examiner’s office. The agency teamed up with the academy for this project.

The medical examiner’s office gets an average of about a dozen skeletonized cases a year, and the work of these artists is a “last-ditch effort” to identify these victims, as a comfort to relatives, and perhaps to open cold cases and, in homicides, find their killers, said Dr. Bradley J. Adams, the agency’s director of forensic anthropology.

Since his office has only done a few skull reconstructions like these, he told the students, “selfishly, I’m going to get 11 reconstructions done in a week.”

Depending on the results, the medical examiner’s office would consider working with the academy on a somewhat regular basis.

For this class, each student was given a skull — a replica made by the medical examiner’s office of each victim — and a block of clay to sculpt a face. The students were told to incorporate whatever information investigators recorded in finding and examining the skeleton, including estimates of the victim’s age and height, maybe a hair type or style, and possible clothing sizes.

Some cases came with additional clues, like a young man believed to be Hispanic who was found in 2004 wrapped in a blanket near the Jackie Robinson Parkway with strands of hair with his remains. There was also a young woman believed to be black who was found in Jamaica Bay in 1991 and who had two gold teeth.

The details hinted at grim stories, of souls found in mysterious and depraved circumstances that often suggested gruesome deaths. The left side of the woman’s skull, for instance, had been crushed.

Mr. Mullins, who works for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in Alexandria, Va., told the class that it was the first time he knew of art students’ trying to help identify homicide victims.

“You guys are a part of history,” he said. “Putting that face on them is our last hope of getting these people identified.”

Mr. Mullins told the students to work like police sketch artists. They were not there for art’s sake, but rather to

make a likeness close enough that it might prompt someone who knew or encountered the victims to recognize them. He said his own sculptures of anonymous skulls had yielded over 30 such hits.

Photographs of the students’ sculptures would be turned over to New York police investigators and posted on an online public database of missing persons run by the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System.

Of the roughly 1,200 still-unidentified bodies the medical examiner’s office has received in the past 25 years, some of its coldest cases are those that arrive skeletonized or so badly decomposed that the face is nonexistent, Mr. Adams said.

The city has begun trying to use the skull to sculpt a face when more traditional methods, such as fingerprinting, dental records and DNA testing, fail.

“This is like the end of the road,” Mr. Adams told the class. “This is something we are going to do if there are no other leads.”

The class seemed an ideal fit for the fine art students at the academy, given its emphasis on anatomical study, said John Volk, the school’s director of continuing education.

One student in the class, Marco Palli, who was sculpting a young man with corn rows, said, “The whole point is having someone say, ‘Hey, that looks like my uncle or my cousin.’”

Mr. Palli said that while he worked on a face for the missing man, “I felt like he was talking to me and that he’d be happy I was doing this for him.”

Since relatives might remember the man through photographs, Mr. Palli said he sculpted the face with a slight smile, “because people usually smile in pictures.”

The skulls seemed generic and similar at first glance. But as Mr. Mullins told the students, each would serve as a distinct blueprint, with its bone structure dictating facial features, as layers of clay were added to create the flesh, skin and cartilage that would rebuild the victim’s face.

Mr. Mullins opened a bag of marbles and placed a pair on each student’s desk, to make eyeballs. He distributed toothpicks to make a structure for the nose by following the lines of the nasal aperture.

He told students to stick closely to whatever the skull and other clues provided. The goal was not to create a brilliant likeness of a specific person, but rather a slightly generic look that might still elicit an identification.

“There is no room for artistic license,” he said.

Carmen Bilton, 48, worked on a skull of the young woman with the gold teeth. Ms. Bilton sculpted the woman with the mouth slightly open, so the teeth could be seen as an identification clue.

Ms. Bilton, a teacher from Eutawville, S.C., said she came to the class in the hope that a realistic rendering might help a family find someone they lost.

“It’s the sense that I would get it right,” Ms. Bilton said, “that maybe I ought to do this.”



### HYPERALLERGIC

Last month, students in the Forensic Sculpture Workshop at the New York Academy of Art (NYAA) made faces for 11 anonymous skulls belonging to unidentified victims of crimes. Now those reconstructions are on view in the windows of the Tribeca university, part of an effort to get more eyes on them in the hopes that they can be identified.

In a New York Times feature on the continuing education workshop, instructor Joe Mullins, a forensic artist at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, noted that this was the only instance he knew of art students participating in identifying homicide victims. The NYAA, with its curriculum focused on anatomy from the bone up, is uniquely equipped to collaborate on forensic reconstruction.

“The Academy teaches anatomy so that artists will know the human figure well enough to depict it from their imaginations, without having to rely on a model being present as a reference,” David Kratz, NYAA president, told Hyperallergic. “This class utilizes exactly those skills.”

In collaboration with the New York City Office of Chief Medical Examiner, 11 plaster replicas of skulls were distributed to students with all the known details about the victims, from general biographical data like gender, race, and age, right down to the bullet holes and bludgeoned bone. By examining the shape of the skull and this evidence, faces emerged of men, women, and a child, something they haven’t had since their decomposed remains were discovered. In addition to the window display, images of the completed sculptures will be added to the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) database and shared with the New York City Police Department.

“The partnership is a great real world example of how the students can apply their highly skilled training in sculpture with their extensive knowledge of anatomy, unique skills sets of Academy artists that are necessary for forensic sculpture,” John Volk, director of the continuing education program at NYAA, told Hyperallergic. “At the end of the day if we can help trigger new leads in cold cases to provide some relief for the victims’ families left behind then I would consider it an honor and a job well done.”

by Allison Meier on February 3, 2015



One of the unidentified crime victims from the New York Academy of Art's Forensic Sculpture Workshop (photograph by Stefania Panepinto, MFA 2015, courtesy New York Academy of Art)



The reconstructed faces on view in the NYAA windows (photograph by the author for Hyperallergic)

# FORENSIC SCULPTURE WORKSHOP

## 2015 PRESS

### THE HUFFINGTON POST

Each student at the Forensic Sculpture Workshop at the New York Academy of Art (NYAA) begins with a skull. More specifically, each begins with a plaster replica of a real human skull made by a medical examiner, a facsimile of an unidentified crime victim in New York City.

From this foundation, the students sculpt a face, using a block of clay and whatever information they can glean from the ongoing investigations — such as age, height, gender and race. They also included grimmer details, such as the locations of bullet holes or crushed bones.

The resulting sculptures, lifelike in their realistic portrayals, capture the likenesses of unknown citizens who faced cruel and untimely deaths from a variety of gruesome circumstances, in the hopes that someone walking by the university windows will see a face and recognize it.

“They lost their identity,” Joe Mullins, a forensic imaging specialist told *The New York Times*. “We’re going to give it back to them.”

“The idea for a Continuing Education forensic sculpture workshop has been on the table for many years,” Academy’s Director of Continuing Education John Volk explained to *The Huffington Post* in an email. “It wasn’t until a colleague introduced me to Joe Mullins — a National Center for Missing & Exploited Children forensic imaging specialist — who has a relationship with the Medical Examiner’s office, that the idea was finally able to come to fruition.

“Our partnership is the perfect marriage of art and science. Having students use art and their extensive knowledge of anatomy for a bigger purpose and real world application to help the community at large was an opportunity worth waiting for and one we hope to replicate for years to come.” For the duration of the workshop, the forensic sculptors are not working to create the most beautiful works of art possible, but the most accurate likeness of a once living, breathing human. In that sense, the mission is more like a police sketch than an artistic sculpture.

### **This Is Forensic Sculpture, A Combination Of Art And Science That Aims To Solve Cold Cases**

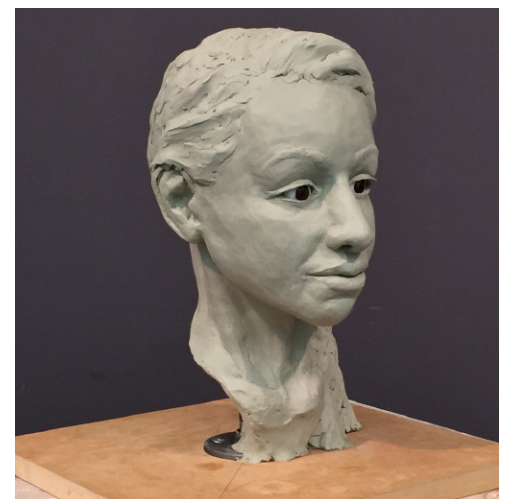


The hope is that, when the completed sculptures are displayed in the university windows, someone who knew one of the victims — maybe a relative, neighbor or an old friend — will recognize the likeness, thus restoring an identity to what are now only skeletons. Images of the sculptures will also be added to the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) database and shared with the New York City Police Department.

The forensic sculpture method normally comes into play once traditional methods like DNA testing and fingerprinting are not available. For many of the skeletal and decayed bodies that remain unidentified victims, this is the final hope.

“To be part of something as profound as using art to potentially trigger new leads in cold cases, to provide some relief or answers some longstanding questions for the families of victims left behind, is extraordinary,” Volk continued. “It’s our hope that as many people stop in to the Academy to see the reconstructions and help spread the word about them. A success story is well within the range of possibility here and how incredible would that be?”

*Priscilla Frank*



# FORENSIC SCULPTURE WORKSHOP

## 2015 PRESS

 CBS EVENING NEWS w/SCOTT PELLEY



### Art students pitch in to help medical examiner identify remains

By Elaine Quijano

Students here at the New York Academy of Art are helping the city's medical examiner's office work through its backlog of 1,200 sets of unidentified remains.

"This is the final ... effort to do it. This is after we have exhausted DNA and other methods. This is simply to trigger someone's memory," said Dr. Bradley Adams, the medical examiner's forensic anthropologist.



Adams scans and copies actual skulls and gives the 3D-printed replicas to students. Crime scene evidence can help determine victims' sex, race and hair color, but little else, so the skulls dictate the details: the size of their eyes, the structures of their cheeks and nose.

Zoe Suesen-Taylor created one of the 11 sculptures. Asked if she felt any pressure working on this, she said "there was an enormous amount of pressure, responsibility. It was a daunting task."

John Volk is the academy's director of continuing education. He says forensic sculpting is more science than art. He told the art students to check their creative license at the door.

"The were told they could not be creative at all in this project. ... It was difficult for them."



The images are now in a national database and the sculptures are on public display. Forensic facial reconstruction has proven to be successful. It helped identify 14-year-old Tara Exposito, whose remains were left unidentified for more than a year until a sculpture was created.

"My biggest hope is that we have - is that we give someone their identity back, a name to go with the face now and bring closure to victims' families. That's a big thing."

Victims finally brought out of the shadows, for everyone to see.



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# FORENSIC SCULPTURE WORKSHOP

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## 2015 PRESS



# THE TIMES

## Sculptors give missing persons new life

Will Pavia



It is not an exhibition for the faint-hearted. In a new show at the New York Academy of Art, the heads of 12 dead people will be mounted on plinths in a gallery facing the street.

These are not just anyone's heads. They were sculpted from the skulls of men, women and one child whose remains have never been identified. Discovered in parks and woods or beside train tracks, they have been brought to life in clay as part of a partnership between the academy and the New York Medical Examiner's Office, which is seeking to identify several hundred sets



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