RECONSTRUCTING THE PAST:
AN EXPLORATION OF THE FORENSIC FACIAL RECONSTRUCTION PROCESS
FOR A PREHISTORIC PUEBLO MALE

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Project

The purpose of this project was to learn about forensic sculpting and compare the results with artistic sculptures I have executed in the past. For this project I wanted to learn about Forensic Facial Reconstruction, also referred to as Facial Approximation. I was interested in exploring what made a forensically accurate sculpture. I also wanted to explore the concept of ethnic bias and how it affects an artist’s portrayal of their subject.

Cultural relativism is an important theme in modern anthropological study, especially because most early Anthropologists were biased toward their own cultures, and because they compared the peoples they were studying to Western cultural models. The purpose of this project was to examine my own cultural and ethnic biases and how they applied to my artistic body of work. I wanted to work with Dr. Spurlock and learn the forensic sculpting process because the data sets used to construct the features, along with the underlying structure of the skull, would work together to help me sculpt a face despite the cultural biases that I held.

Figurative sculpture is a discipline in which I have a considerable amount of experience. Like many artists, I have reviewed my body of work and found that many of my figures exhibit a bias: in some ways they look like me, and what I culturally consider to be the ideal beauty standard. As Karen Taylor states, “although we may not want to admit it, for each of us the ideal face is the one we have seen in the mirror all of our lives."
It is an age-old struggle for artists to avoid incorporation of their own features in their work,” (Taylor, 2001: 85).

All of the faces I have sculpted so far are somewhat feminine and display Caucasian features. Seeing how my bias had a tendency to affect my work, I understood why it was important for me to examine the culture of Pueblo Man. This way I could get a better feel for his history. I could then put some of that information into the reconstruction. With this project I wanted to really reconstruct the past, not just create another figurative sculpture.

This sculpture of a Pueblo man was built on a skull cast obtained from the France Casting Lab, an American company in Colorado. The cast is an exact replica of a Pueblo Indian skull. When choosing a skull for reconstruction, I wanted to choose an individual with a life drastically different from my own and deliberately selected an older male of a different ancestry. I would have preferred to recreate a face from a native of the Ohio area. I had hoped to take this opportunity to learn about the people that originally inhabited this area, and to put a face and a story to the people that my ancestors ultimately displaced. However, I could not find any skulls or skull casts from the Ohio region that matched the quality needed to make an appropriate sculpture.

CHAPTER II: FORENSIC FACIAL APPROXIMATION

The field of forensic art features a combined expertise in both art and science. Forensic art uses scientific information, such as average tissue depths at landmarks on the
skull and knowledge of osteology, to recreate unique facial features. Collection and use of that data is still limited, however, and it remains a subjective process. Each reconstruction will be unique to the artist.

Forensic art has been used for decades as a tool for law enforcement. Although the techniques used in three-dimensional reconstruction were initially developed in the 1950s, they were not widely used until the late 1960s (Taylor, 2001). Betty Pat. Gatliff is a pioneer in the field of forensic three-dimensional facial reconstruction and was the first artist to sculpt faces onto skulls using a method originally suggested by W. M. Krogman (1962).

Art is frequently driven by a perception of beauty or simplicity. Our ideals of perfect beauty and proportion have changed considerably over the years (Taylor, 2001). Our modern Western attitudes of an ideal beauty can be traced back to the Greeks and their theories about facial proportions. The Greeks often freely idealized the proportions and simplified the form (Bradbury, 1949). These guidelines for facial proportions are not scientifically based, but are subjective and aesthetic. They are used for the spacing of facial features so that they appear balanced and symmetrical. These guidelines continue to bias our Western view of traditional and classical beauty, and are ingrained in us as artists. The very foundation of Art Education in this country is based on aesthetics and rules. As a classically trained artist, I have strived to sculpt perfect faces, faces that everyone can admire and find attractive. As Bradbury says in his anatomical guide for the artist (1949; 20) “The corresponding bone in every normal person is essentially the same.” This type of thinking encourages a formulaic approach to the human figure and
ignores the actual range of anatomical variation. To be a forensic sculptor, one also must possess a deep understanding of anatomy and an appreciation for unique features on bone—both of these are essential to the success of a forensic facial reconstruction.

To use the Pueblo Man as an example, he has an asymmetrically deformed skull (*plagiocephaly*). This deformation is seen in many native peoples and comes from the cultural practice of carrying infants strapped to a flat board. Their malleable skulls will, over months, flatten to match the contours of the board. As a forensic sculptor, I had to learn how to emphasize the distinctly individual features of the subject. The main difference between a fine artist and a forensic artist is that many fine artists seek to homogenize the human features to create a perceived “ultimate beauty”, or to exaggerate certain features or facial expressions to communicate emotion or mystery. Forensic artists seek to individualize their subjects and indicate the human differences that make every person truly unique.

**Building a Biological Profile**

Simply put, forensic art is concerned with identifying human remains and using them to accurately recreate a previous form. The first step when identifying remains is to determine whether the sample is bone or not. If they are bone, the next step is to determine if they are human. When bones are separated from the complete skeleton, especially if no skull is present, it is easy for an amateur to confuse nonhuman bones for those of a human. According to forensic anthropologist Douglas Ubelaker, between ten and fifteen percent of the cases brought to the FBI each year involve remains that are not
human (Thomas, 2003). Sometimes bones can be examined microscopically to
determine species origin when the proportion of spongy bone to the compact outer bone
is significantly different between species. The pattern of the osteons in the bone center
can also differ between species (Thomas, 2003). Most importantly, the shapes of non-
human mammal bones structurally vary from ours because of our bipedal nature; the
joints of humans are shaped very differently from those of quadrupedal animals. Unless
the excavation site is a cemetery, when dealing with ancient remains many solitary bones
and bone fragments will be the remains of prey or domestic animals consumed by the
humans being excavated. Often, prehistoric burials are within midden heaps, or trash
piles, so food left overs are a common find (Thomas, 2003). When the remains are
confirmed to be human, the next step in the process for identifying unknown remains is to
make a biological profile. This involves examining the remains and determining a
probable sex, age range, stature estimate and ethnic background.

Sexing remains can be attempted using almost any bone but pelvises and the
skulls produce the most accurate results. Like most species, humans are sexually
dimorphic meaning that there are several noticeable anatomical differences between the
sexes. Generally, males have more robust frames, meaning the bones are thicker and
longer, while females have a gracile frame with smoother and smaller bones. Bony ridges
will form on bones where muscles connect, and because males generally have a larger
amount of muscle, these processes are larger (Thomas, 2003). If a female is more robust
in stature or a male is more gracile, sex determination can be more difficult.
The hipbone (os coxa) is the best one to use in sexual identification because it is the only bone that is functionally different between males and females. Female pelvises are designed for childbirth, which means that they have to be capable of passing a fetus through the birthing canal. In general, females have a wider and shallower pelvis, while that of males are narrow and deep (Thomas, 2003).

The skull is the second most useful set of bones when it comes to identification of sex. The more robust male skull has a larger mastoid process (Thomas, 2003) and the chin is squarer and more pronounced. Because of their larger neck muscles, males tend to have a large external occipital protuberance on the back of the skull, which anchors the neck muscles. The brow ridges are generally larger and the superior orbital margins are more blunt. These characteristics are present in the Pueblo Man, which leads to the classification of him as male.

Determining an exact age in adults is difficult, but forensic anthropologists can narrow this down to a window of about ten years. Sub-adult remains are easier to age because changes occur more rapidly in infants, children and adolescents. The numbers of adult and deciduous teeth are a clear indicator of age, as are the fusing of epiphyses to long bones. At birth, humans are born with roughly 300 bones, but throughout life they will fuse to form only 206 bones. The elements of each bone fuse at a different time and in a predictable progression, allowing forensic anthropologists to age the skeletal remains (Thomas, 2003).

Adult skulls are aged based on tooth wear and the closure of cranial sutures. Adult postcrania are aged based on changes in the pelvis at the pubic symphysis and auricular
area of the hipbone. The Bureau of Land Management report states that they used the pubic symphysis for aging, and that it “shows development characterized by late Suchey-Brooks Phase III standards for males. The mean age for this phase is 28.8 years with a 95% range of 22 to 43 years” (II-1). Aging by changes in the pubic symphysis is one of the most reliable methods of age determination (Christensen et al., 2014). Working from a cast of the skull makes it harder to tell the degree of cranial suture closure, however the fact that Pueblo Man’s cranial sutures are fused together but not yet obliterated fits well with the age estimate from the pubic symphysis. His teeth also show sign of wear and thinning gums, indicating an older individual (Bureau of Land Management, 1988).

It is important to understand variations between and within “racial” groups and to be culturally sensitive to both the “race” and ethnicity of their subject (Taylor, 2001). “Race” is a traditionally used category although “ancestry” or “geographical origins” are more appropriate terms for the populations of today's world. The job of the forensic artist is to draw or sculpt their likeness based on the biological profile given by a forensic anthropologist, not to to label a person racially or ethnically. Artists have to be sensitive to stereotypes and prejudices when reviewing witness statements and also to examine their own prejudices and try to remain neutral (Taylor, 2001).

The Pueblo Man skull exhibits shovel-shaped incisors, tented nasal bones, and the nasal aperture is wider than that expected in a Caucasoid. The zygomatic bones are projecting forward, causing a prominent cheek, and the dental arcade is parabolic in shape (Bureau of Land Management, 1988). ‘Mongoloid’ skulls, which include populations from Asia and Native Americans, often have a flat face and a short cranial
vault or distance from front to back. The cheeks are wide with projecting zygomatic bones. Nose and mouth width is usually intermediate between that of a Caucasoid and Negroid (Taylor, 2001).

All of these characteristics, present on Pueblo Man, led the BLM Forensic Anthropologist Dr. Diane L. France to conclude that the skull belonged to an American Indian. Based on the information gathered from the report, I knew that I would be sculpting a middle-aged man of American Indian Ancestry, most likely Pueblo. Before sculpting even began, I researched the culture and the artifacts associated with the Pueblo peoples. I then made several artistic choices that would affect the sculpting process and shape the final result. The subject was part of a desert society and over the span of his estimated life the Pueblo peoples had gone from an extremely prosperous and culturally rich society to one on the verge of collapse. For my reconstruction, I heavily aged his face, and chose to give him a lean, thin appearance to reflect these living conditions.

The Sculpting Process

The presence of a skull as the starting point really sets fine art sculpture apart from forensic sculpture. When beginning a fine art sculpture, it is necessary to first construct a stable base for your sculpture, essentially making a “skull” to build upon later. If this base is the wrong size or shape, it will cause trouble later on in the sculpting process. The skull indicates the structure of the face, so having the skull cast of your subject to provide guidance to the spacing and size of features makes the sculpting process a lot easier. Having knowledge of how the bones of the face form, break, and heal is pivotal to the
forensic sculpture process. If there is evidence of an old healed wound, the healed wound is included in the forensic sculpture to help with identification. Similarly, knowledge of how muscles respond to stress is essential. Muscles of the head and face can change depending on the nature of the subject’s occupation and lifestyle. Muscles are also critical in determining secondary characteristics such as wrinkles. Wrinkles will form perpendicular to the muscle’s line of action so an understanding of facial muscle structure is necessary in order to properly age a face and make it look believable (Taylor, 2001).

When deciding to complete a three-dimensional forensic reconstruction, preparing the skull is the most important step. Scientific procedure must be followed closely when preparing the skull, as it must be protected as an item of physical evidence. When mounting a skull for reconstruction, an imaginary line is drawn between the bottom of the eye socket and the upper rim of the external auditory canal. This line, referred to as the Frankfort Horizontal, should be parallel to the ground and will give the subject the natural appearance that they are looking “at you”. The mandible will have to be reattached, along with any teeth that have fallen out postmortem, and the eye sockets and nose opening padded with cotton to protect the delicate bones (Taylor, 2001).

The skull can be worked on now, but it is recommended to work from a cast. This allows the actual skull to be studied or reburied, and provides a more stable structure for the heavy oil based clay used for reconstruction. The skull is fragile in areas, and if a real skull is used for reconstruction, then it must be handled gently and stored carefully to prevent breakage. For artists to attempt to replicate the soft tissue of the skull, they have
to follow guidelines based on the subject’s age, race, and sex. A forensic specialist should give all of this information to the reconstruction artist.

There are two methods used to recreate the soft tissue. The first is called the Anatomical Method, and involves building each of the muscles of the face first, then laying the skin on top. This method does not use tissue-depth markers. I used the tissue-depth method for my reconstruction, which used average soft tissue thickness measurements at specific points on the skull.

Tissue depth marker data were originally collected from corpses, by sticking a pin into the face at different intervals and then marking the pin when it hit bone (Thomas, 2003). The data pool was skewed, however, because most of the subjects tested were Caucasian males. The improvement of non-invasive imaging technology, such as CT scans, has allowed data to be collected from live individuals. This is important for a proper measurement because the thickness of the flesh changes almost immediately after death. To mark the tissue depth on the skull, a rubber mechanical pencil eraser is cut to the proper length. The markers are then glued to the skull, and will serve as guides for the first layer of clay (Fig 1). Tissue depth marker data is available for different sexes, ethnicities, and (if known) specific to the person’s weight in life (normal, obese, or thin). For my sculpture I decided to depict my subject as thinner and older looking. I wanted to reflect the hard times his culture was going through (including recurrent episodes of starvation) during the time of his life and death.

The job of sculpting becomes very straightforward after the tissue markers are placed. First, thin strips of clay are laid over the forehead, the scalp, cheeks, and chin to
fill out the face (Fig 2). For this sculpture I used clay eyes because I want to make a plaster cast of the finished piece, but it is common to use glass prosthetic eyes (Fig. 3). The lips are added next. In a resting mouth, the lips extend to cover the first six teeth. The anterior nasal spine is used to approximate the projection of the nose (Taylor, 2001).

Pueblo Man lived in an artisan culture that was relatively sophisticated and advanced compared to the rest of Pueblo history. He would have worn woven cloth garments along with animal skins and used highly decorative ceramics and other prestige goods (Roediger, 1941). This information, along with photographs of Pueblo individuals from the nineteenth century (Bird-Romero, 1992), informed my stylization of the final bust (Fig. 4). I chose to sculpt the hair instead of using a wig for the same reason I chose to sculpt the eyes; I want to be able to cast the finished piece (Figures 5-8). I did use a strip of roughly woven cloth as a hair ornament based on photographs of Pueblo individuals (Bird-Romero, 1992). As a finishing touch, I painted the sculpture’s base in the style of Pueblo III period pottery. The symbol depicted is a rain bird, a symbol linked to mythology associated with the afterlife in Pueblo culture (Fig. 9). The finished bust was displayed in the exhibit titled “Beauty of Data” by the Kent State University Libraries’ third floor Muse Lab (Fig. 10).

CHAPTER III: PUEBLO CULTURE IN CONTEXT

The burial site in which the subject was found is what archaeologists classify as a storage room. This means that the room had no fire pit or other features (Bureau of Land Management, 1988). Ancient Pueblo people seldom buried adult members of the...
community within 50 meters of the community living quarters (Hill, 1970), and it is likely that this was a seasonal dwelling used during harvesting and planting (Bureau of Land Management 1988).

The skull I reconstructed was found in Dolores County, Colorado in 1985, by an oil drilling company. Upon discovery of the skeletal remains the company contacted the Bureau of Land Management in Colorado. They wanted to build a new well but there was evidence of prehistoric Indian activity on the land. Even though it was private land, a team of archaeologists was sent to survey the site. A single set of human remains were found here, and later reburied after scientific analysis was completed. The remains most likely belonged to the Mesa Verde Pueblo (Bureau of Land Management, 1988).

**Mesa Verde During the Pueblo III Period**

The people that we refer to as the Pueblo Indians are actually a group of several tribes ancestrally linked to what is now the Four Corners region of the United States. The Spanish first employed the term Pueblo when they encountered these native groups; they are also referred to as the Anasazi. “Pueblo” is Spanish for village. This term was used because the Pueblo Indians built large permanent settlements. “Anasazi” means “ancient people” in the Navajo language.

The BLM report cites carbon 14 dating and places the remains at 770 +/- 60 years B.P. (before present, the carbon dating marker that is set at 1950). This puts the remains between 1180-1290 C.E (common era). This is within the Pueblo III period, which lasted
from approximately 1150 C.E. to 1300 C.E. Although the Pueblo II Period is marked by the growth of communities centered in Chaco Canyon, by 1150 C.E. drought had stressed the region’s inhabitants, leading to a migration to Mesa Verde by the Pueblo III period. This caused major population growth in the area. Pueblos continued to thrive in the Mesa Verde area until another severely dry period from 1276 to 1299 C.E. ended continuous human occupation at Mesa Verde. Archeologists refer to this period as the Great Drought. The last inhabitants of the mesa left the area around 1285 C.E. (Cameron, 2006).

The mid-Pueblo III period was the pinnacle of Anasazi culture. There was an increase in architectural development, and pottery designs were at their most elaborate. Structures built during this period have been described as "among the world's greatest archaeological treasures" (Varien, 2006: 39). Mesa Verde is best known for a large number of well-preserved cliff dwellings, houses built in alcoves, or rock overhangs, along the canyon walls. The structures within these alcoves were mostly blocks of hard sandstone, held together and plastered with adobe mortar. The cliff dwellings of Mesa Verde reflected a region-wide trend towards condensing of populations and the development of more defensible homes during the 13th century C.E. (Lipe, 2006).

Periodic warfare occurred on the mesa throughout the 13th century C.E. Evidence of violence and cannibalism has been documented in the Mesa Verde region (Lipe, 2006). Many of the victims showed signs of skull fractures that suggest that they were inflicted by small stone axes. Others were scalped, dismembered, and cannibalized. The cannibalism might have been undertaken as a survival strategy during times of starvation.
during the drought (Kuckelman, 2006). Pueblo Man also had marks of violence; there was a perimortem wound to the back of his head, and knife marks on his skull indicating that he was scalped (Bureau of Land Management, 1988). These wounds were not healed, which means that they occurred around the time of death. I chose not to depict the scalping because I wanted to create a portrait of what Pueblo Man looked like before his death.

Trophy-taking behavior, such as scalping, has been observed throughout the prehistoric, and historic, Americas. It was an important part of American Indian cultures (Schaafsma, 2007) and contributed to the pattern of warfare practiced by these tribes. A large number of violent death burials that are recovered show signs of trophy taking behavior such as decapitation, dismemberment, and mutilation. Trophies have also been recovered in burials, such as human teeth used for ornament and tools made from human bone (Mensforth, 2001).

The Ancestral Pueblo had a long history of migration in the face of environmental instability, but the depopulation of Mesa Verde at the end of the Pueblo III period was different. The region was almost completely emptied, and no descendants returned to build permanent settlements. Although drought, resource depletion, and overpopulation all contributed to instability during the last two centuries of Ancestral Puebloan occupation, their overdependence on maize crops is considered the fatal flaw of their subsistence strategy (Varien, 2006).
CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

I was only interested in the mechanical aspects of forensic sculpture heading into this thesis. I wanted to learn about the sculpture process to push my boundaries as an artist. Throughout this project, as I dove deep into the turbulent history of the Pueblo peoples and learned more about the possible life of my subject, I have come to see Pueblo Man as a person instead of just a project. His people built beautiful cities in the desert, but ultimately had to abandon these places to seek more fertile land. My subject would have had a life that was much harder than either the generation before him, or after him. I wanted to put this stoic sense of survival into the features of Pueblo Man.

This sense of culture and place points to an important distinction between artistic and forensic sculpture that I did not appreciate going in. When working with a human skull, even if using a plaster replica, there is a sense of holding a person’s very essence. Pueblo Man would have been an elder in his community. He would most likely have children and grandchildren. I have sculpted subjects from life before, yet working with the skull cast made me acutely aware that this was a specific individual that I was attempting to depict. This pushed me to make him individual.

I wanted to work with Dr. Spurlock and learn the forensic sculpting process because the data sets used to construct the features, along with the underlying structure of the skull, would work together to help me sculpt a face despite the cultural biases that I held regarding what a face should look like. The skull helped immensely with this
process. Our bones hold the history of our life, and I was forced to be authentic to the
story that they told. I choose an individual with a life drastically different from my own,
an older male of a different ancestry, and I have learned a lot about myself as an artist in
the process. Creating a forensic sculpture is different than working with a model or a
photograph. I had to let the skull dictate the face, and for the first time while sculpting a
bust, I felt like I was telling another person’s story. That is a powerful feeling, and one
that I hope to bring to all my future work.
Figure 1: The skull is mounted on the Frankfort Horizontal and the tissue depth markers are added. You can see in the profile view that the back of the skull is flattened.
Figure 2: First phase of sculpture, clay is added to the scalp and cheeks.
Figure 3: The features are fully blocked in, now detail work can begin. At this point, I considered sculpting the mouth open. I changed my mind and decided on a more stoic final sculpture.
Figure 4: Final touches added to the face in the form of hair and skin texture. I wanted Pueblo man to appear close to what he looked like around his death, so I sculpted him as an older and thinner individual to reflect the periods of starvation.
Figure 5: Right profile view of the finished sculpture. I added the cloth to the hair to give added texture to the sculpture and to mimic 19th century photographs of Pueblo Indians. The hair is depicted as cropped roughly at the ears.
Figure 6: Three-quarters view of finished sculpture. This view emphasizes the elongated forehead that the plagiocephaly caused. The skull deformation caused a shift in “classic facial proportions” that I had to take into account in my final sculpture.
Figure 7: Back view of the finished sculpture
Figure 8: Left profile of the finished sculpture.
Figure 9: The base of the sculpture is painted in a pattern similar to the Pueblo III period rain bird symbol. The rain bird is important symbolism associated with Pueblo funerary customs. I decided to pay homage to this symbol to try to honor the spirit of the subject of my sculpture.
Figure 10: Exhibit view of the sculpture. Pueblo Man bust on display at the “Beauty of Data” exhibit at the Kent State University Library.
Works Cited


