



## Utah

# Police artist puts faces to crimes

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It was key in finding Elizabeth Smart and her alleged kidnappers. But it also was a source of controversy.

A sketch artist drawing of a roofer known only as "Emmanuel" was released Feb. 16, 2003, on America's Most Wanted. The sketch was based on then-9-year-old Mary Katherine Smart's memory of a man who had worked at the Smarts' house for just five hours, six months prior to her sister's abduction.

The release of that picture opened the floodgates of sightings and other information on Brian David Mitchell, who was arrested less than a month later and eventually charged along with co-defendant Wanda Barzee with kidnapping and assaulting Elizabeth. Mitchell's relatives contacted the Smarts less than 24 hours after the sketch was aired on TV.

In hindsight, Salt Lake City police later admitted they wished they had released the sketch sooner. At the time, however, investigators were worried it would generate many false leads from the public that would eat up valuable time.

Michael Streed, an internationally renowned police sketch artist in California, understands the struggle over whether to release a sketch or get a sketch artist involved.

Streed has been doing police sketches for more than 25 years. He drew the sketch of Alejandro Avila, who is currently awaiting trial in the 2002 kidnap and murder of 5-year-old Samantha Runnion. Streed's sketch led to Avila's arrest.

Streed also compiled sketches of the Baton Rouge, La., serial killer in the '90s and a man wanted in connection with the abduction and murder of 10-year-old Anthony Martinez in Riverside County, Calif., in 1997. That case remains unsolved.

Locally, Streed was hired by America's Most Wanted to compile a computer-generated composite of a man wanted for questioning in the death of 10-year-old Anna Palmer. Palmer was stabbed to death Sept. 10, 1998, on the porch of her home at 1633 S. 300 East. The case remains unsolved.

Streed has just published a book, "SketchCops — True Stories From Those Who Draw The Line Against Crime," that looks at the successes, and sometimes the failures, of using a police sketch as a crime-fighting tool.

"It personalizes the case," Streed said of the advantage of using a composite drawing. "It gives people something to react to . . . to look for. That's why shows like America's Most Wanted are so popular."

But not everyone is completely sold on the idea of sketch artists. Some argue the drawings are subjective and left open to interpretation.

"Some consider it a voodoo science because it's not a positive ID area like DNA or fingerprints," Streed said. "Some believe people aren't good enough witnesses."

Streed conceded in some cases good old-fashioned police work resulted in a case being solved rather than a sketch drawing.

But in reality, he doesn't believe sketch artists are used enough.

"I think police and detectives don't understand how to use them and how they can be used," he said. "There's a lot of sensationalism about tainting and polluting witnesses' minds. You'd almost have to lock them in a dark room to make sure

their memory isn't 'tainted.' "

Streed said the same is true whether talking about adults or children. He said he has done sketch drawings from interviewing children as young as 5 years old that are completely accurate.

"They're a lot stronger than people give them credit for," Streed said of the resilience of children and their ability to bounce back quickly.

In the case of Elizabeth Smart, Streed said, "I got the impression there was a lot of overprotection done with Mary Katherine. If it's handled gently and professionally you can push a little bit (to interview children) but not be unreasonable."

Early in the Smart investigation, Mary Katherine talked to renowned sketch artist Jeanne Boylan, best known for her drawing of Unabomber Ted Kaczynski. But a sketch was never released.

Streed's book also outlines how a person can be a good witness and "record" his memory, which could potentially help a sketch artist come up with a composite to solve a case.

Despite today's technology that allows composites to be made through computer-generated images, Streed doesn't believe a sketch artist will ever become outdated.

"In the more serious cases you're going to want to have that maximum interaction between human to human," he said.

But that doesn't mean Streed is opposed to computer-generated images. In fact, he even helps instruct other officers on how to use those types of computers. As long as quality images continue to be produced and bad guys are captured, Streed said it didn't matter who got a sketch out to the public, just as long as it was out there.

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