

## **Francis Augustus "Frank" Bender**

Born:            B. June 16, 1941  
                    D. July 28, 2011

Frank Bender was an internationally recognized autodidact forensic and fine artist. His talent for forensic facial reconstruction, working first with the Philadelphia police department, then with the FBI, America's Most Wanted, Scotland Yard and the governments of Mexico and Egypt, made him widely recognized as a leader in his field.

Frank began his career as a commercial photographer. He had little formal training in sculpture, but one day, his fascination with anatomy brought him to the Philadelphia morgue. There he discovered a remarkable ability: the capacity to intuit the form and personality of a human face from its fleshless skull. Entrusted with the skull of a murder victim, he returned shortly with his first bust. Soon he had the first of many IDs: Anna Duvall. Several years later, after he received his first large monument commission, he closed his photography studio, ceased his advertising work, and set out on a second, very different career as a forensic and fine artist. Since the early 70s until his passing in July 2011, Frank's ceramic busts led to the identification of numerous murder victims and the apprehension of fugitive killers. He has also provided faces to Akhmim mummies and the remains of a 5,300 year old man.

In 1989 America's Most Wanted commissioned Frank to produce a bust of John Emil List. List was an accountant from New Jersey who, in 1971, killed his wife, mother and children, parked his car at Kennedy Airport and disappeared. The challenge was to show List as he would have looked after 18 years on the lam. Frank's bust was perfect, down to the pair of square glasses that he intuited List would wear. Based on Frank's model, List, now remarried and living in Denver, was identified by a neighbor, captured and convicted. America's Most Wanted host John Walsh called it the most brilliant piece of detective work he had ever seen, and kept the John List bust in his office for many years.

Frank had a dual career as a fine artist. His watercolors, pastels, sculptures and monuments are in many private and public collections. These playful, emotionally charged works not only display his skills working across several mediums but, often informed by his forensic work and referred to as "downloads", they are exemplary cases of the connection between fine art and public service. To learn more about Frank's life, particularly his work with the Mexican police in Ciudad Juarez, see Ted Botha's recent book, "The Girl with the Crooked Nose". He is also a principal character in "The Murder Room", by Michael Capuzzo. A documentary on his life is currently in development by Karen Mintz and Simon Egleton.

For regular updates please visit the BenderArts blog. If you are interested in discussing Frank's work please contact Vanessa Bender at [benderarts@gmail.com](mailto:benderarts@gmail.com).