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## Visual Illusions

May 14, 2009 2:32 PM

**The winners of the 2009 Best Visual Illusion of the Year Contest.**

<<http://illusioncontest.neuralcorrelate.com/>> And past years. (ante <<http://www.metafilter.com/74466/Heres-looking-at-youme-kid>> )

posted by **dios** (25 comments total)

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Make sure to catch the trophies by artist **Guido Moretti** <[http://www.guidomoretti.it/E\\_terzavia.htm](http://www.guidomoretti.it/E_terzavia.htm)> .

posted by **dios** at **2:34 PM** on May 14 [1 favorite]

The **curveball** <<http://illusioncontest.neuralcorrelate.com/2009/the-break-of-the-curveball/>> one is pretty amazing. The **face / gender**

<<http://illusioncontest.neuralcorrelate.com/2009/the-illusion-of-sex/>> one is

interesting. The **dove** <<http://illusioncontest.neuralcorrelate.com/2009/color-dove-illusion/>> is just kind of "Well, duh." Anyway, thanks for this.

posted by **dersins** at **2:42 PM** on May 14

Curveball deserves a win.

posted by **gravity** at **2:50 PM** on May 14

I found the face/gender one most interesting, as the other two rely on more common illusion techniques. Why does contrast affect perception of gender?

posted by **MetaMonkey** at **2:50 PM** on May 14

*Why does contrast affect perception of gender?*

My first guess is that part of it is that we're conditioned to seeing photographs of female faces wearing makeup. Lipstick (usually) darkens the lips relative to the rest of the face, and eyeliner and eyeshadow (usually) darken the eyes relative to the rest of the face,

creating an "illusion" of heightened contrast, so when we see a photograph with heightened contrast, we subconsciously associate that with a feminine look.

I have no idea whether this is actually the case, but it's was the immediate (and perhaps mistaken) conclusion that I jumped to.

posted by **dersins** at **2:56 PM** on May 14

Yeah the illusion of sex one was fascinating.

posted by **shakespeherian** at **2:59 PM** on May 14

So a curve ball doesn't actually curve much, but rather tricks the batter into over-compensating?

posted by **jpdoane** at **3:02 PM** on May 14

Wow, these are SO COOL! Thanks!!!

posted by **Cygnnet** at **3:25 PM** on May 14

Dersins, that's what I thought too. Before I read the paragraph, though, I actually perceived the higher-contrast image as male, for what it's worth (which is probably about as much as the ink it cost to print this).

posted by **nosila** at **4:00 PM** on May 14

These are coooooo!

*So a curve ball doesn't actually curve much, but rather tricks the batter into over-compensating?*

A curveball really does curve. See **The Physics of Baseball** <<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0060084367/metafilter-20/ref=nosim/>> for quite a good treatment of this.

I think that reference on the illusion page was just meant to highlight how the ball on the page looks like it is curving when you move your eyes... whereas when you look in a fixed location, it appears to move in a straight line (directly down or at an angle depending on where you look).

posted by **FishBike** at **4:03 PM** on May 14

Y'all missed out. I was in the audience for this (**VSS 2009** <<http://www.visionosciences.org/meeting.html>> in Naples, FL last week), and not only were all the illusions awesome (I voted for the Color Dove illusion myself), but there was also great music, confetti, and the inestimable Peter Thompson (**seen here in my crappy cameraphone footage right after the curveball illusion** <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/3e/3532436634/>> ).

Were any other mefites there? Memail me, we'll meet up at VSS 2010!

posted by **dmd** at **4:44 PM** on May 14

*dove is just kind of "Well, duh."*

It is most definitely **not** "well, duh". Nobody has ever reported this phenomenon before, ever. This is **not** an afterimage as one normally thinks of it (e.g., one mediated by the retina or LGN). In this illusion, you're seeing color where there was no color to begin with - and not a complementary color, either.

posted by **dmd** at **4:47 PM** on May 14

Oh, also, James Randi did a show while they were counting the votes.

Ok, done gloating now.

posted by **dmd** at **4:52 PM** on May 14

Not quite as exciting as last year's "Holy Crap! Afterimages aren't supposed to work that way!" winner, but still pretty good. The dove illusion is more interesting than the curveball illusion, I think, but it's just a riff on last year's winner (the filling in of afterimage effects), so the curveball illusion deserved it.

I looked up the shortlist a little while back, and when I saw that one was called "the illusion of sex", I had to Google the researchers and look for the illusion. Given the title, I was a little disappointed.

posted by **painquale** at **5:11 PM** on May 14

dmd: last year's winner exhibited the same general effect, but without continuous motion.

posted by **painquale** at **5:12 PM** on May 14

Neat stuff. That face illusion reminds me of **this one**. <[http://www.grand-illusions.com/opticalillusions/angry\\_and\\_calm/](http://www.grand-illusions.com/opticalillusions/angry_and_calm/)>

posted by **orme** at **6:03 PM** on May 14

That dice illusion they use for the page background is fabulous.

posted by **smackfu** at **7:07 PM** on May 14

The curveball reversal thing is the one that does it for me. Most illusions aren't really persistent... you can force your brain to see what's really happening, but I couldn't at all with this one.

posted by **cmoj** at **7:56 PM** on May 14

The dove one is not working for me; the bird looks empty/white no matter what, though maybe sometimes a slightly off-white white after the color flash. Monitor fail, eyes fail? Not colorblind.

Curveball and gender ones were nice, though.

posted by **emjaybee** at **8:08 PM** on May 14

*My first guess is that part of it is that we're conditioned to seeing photographs of female faces wearing makeup.*

Make-up further extenuates the biological sex difference. Women have lighter skin relative to men (of the same race), because testosterone darkens skin. Lighter skins also makes lips and eyes stand out more.

posted by **dgaicun** at **8:53 PM** on May 14 [1 favorite]

Dove one doesn't work on me either.

posted by **You Should See the Other Guy** at **10:14 PM** on May 14

I can't see the curveball one, it just looks like it's falling downwards at no angle. I feel illusion-dumb.

posted by **Shecky** at **10:47 PM** on May 14

*Accentuates* the sex difference. Firefox spellcheck mishap o' the day.

See **here** <[http://pages.globetrotter.net/peter\\_frost61z/fwdm2.htm](http://pages.globetrotter.net/peter_frost61z/fwdm2.htm)> and **here**. <[http://pages.globetrotter.net/peter\\_frost61z/fwdm4.htm](http://pages.globetrotter.net/peter_frost61z/fwdm4.htm)> (This face illusion is at least five or six years old. I was surprised to see it as a 2009 thing.)

A sex difference in skin color begins at puberty when female skin lightens due to thickening subcutaneous fat, which converts androgens to estrogens, creating a layer of lighter tissue near the skin surface.

The sex difference disappears in Northern Europe and Equatorial Africa (where skin is maximally light and maximally dark, respectively).

posted by **dgaicun** at **12:30 AM** on May 15

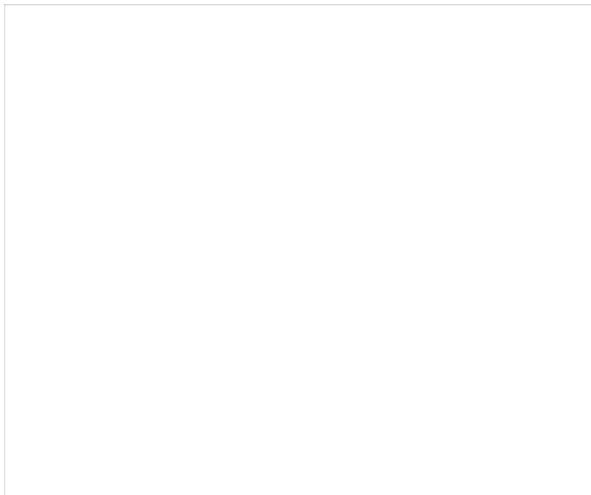
I agree, with emjaybee, the dove one doesn't work for me. The background resonates some after color, as expected but the dove always remains white. Am I broken?

posted by **like\_neon** at **1:40 AM** on May 15

The illusion of sex...

All too familiar.

posted by **The Ultimate Olympian** at **7:27 AM** on May 15



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