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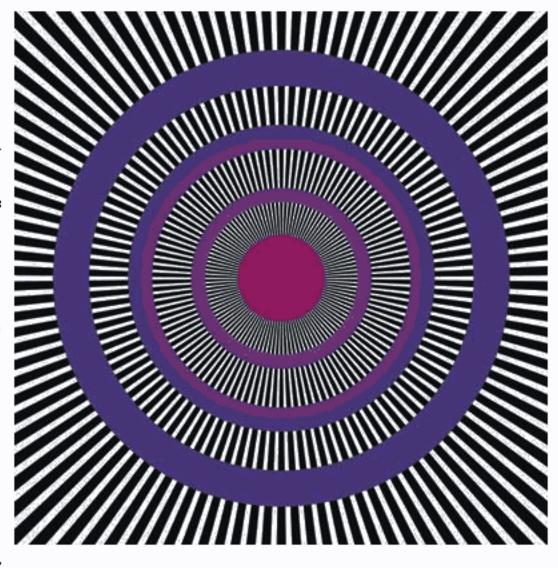
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## ¶ SHIFTY EYE MOVEMENTS BEHIND FAMOUS OPTICAL ILLUSION

David Robson in New Scientist:

Neuroscientists
have shown that
the way our eyes
constantly make
tiny movements
is responsible for
the way
concentric circles
in Isia Leviant's
painting 'Enigma'
(see image, right)
seem to flow
before onlookers'
eyes.

Susana
Martinez-Conde
and her team
from the Barrow
Neurological
Institute in
Phoenix, Arizona,



tested whether the effect was down to tiny, involuntary jerks of the eyes, known as microsaccades. Their purpose is not fully understood, but the rate of these movements is known to vary naturally.

In the team's experiment, while three subjects viewed Enigma, cameras recorded their eye movements 500 times every second. The subjects were asked to press a button when the speed of the optical "trickle" of the illusion appeared to slow down or stop, and release it when the trickle seemed faster.

Accounting for the reaction time required to press the button, the results showed that the illusion became more pronounced when microsaccades were happening at a faster rate. When the rate slowed to a stop, the illusion vanished.

Those results go against earlier findings that suggested eye movements were not responsible for the effect.