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Dr. Martinez-Conde's laboratory recently discovered that microsaccades, a small, unconscious eye movement that occurs when humans fixate their eyes, are critical to normal vision. The team of scientists conducted the Enigma study to see if microsaccades are also behind the perception of this illusion. Based on their study, the hypothesis suggesting the illusion originates solely in the brain was ruled out.

Participants in the study observed the Enigma illusion while their eye movements were simultaneously recorded with high precision cameras. Microsaccade rates increased before the illusory motion sped up and decreased before the motion slowed, revealing a direct link between the eye movements and the illusion.

"We have discovered that this illusion originates with eye movements and not solely the brain as previously thought," says Dr. Martinez-Conde. "The findings from the study could help design future prosthetics for patients with brain damage or brain lesions that affect the perception of motion."

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