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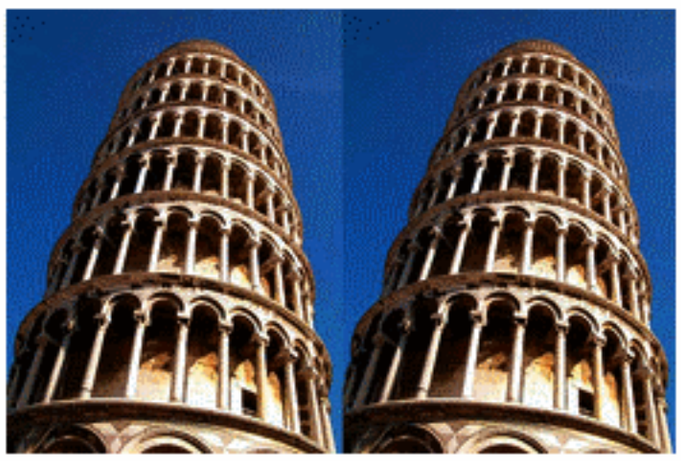
November 21, 2010

Brain Tricks

In "Sleights of Mind: What the Neuroscience of Magic Reveals About Our Everyday Deceptions," authors Stephen L. Macknik and Susana Martinez-Conde, with Sandra Blakeslee, explain the secrets of illusions—from the way magicians take advantage of the brain's own logic to perform their tricks, to why a static drawing of lines will appear to be moving to our eyes.



> **The two images of the Leaning Tower of Pisa at right are identical**, but to a viewer it seems that the tower on the right leans more. This is because our visual system treats the two images as if they were part of a single scene. Normally, two neighboring towers will rise skyward in parallel, with their outlines converging as they recede from view.
>
> This is one of the iron-clad laws of perspective, and it's so invariant that your visual system automatically takes it into account. Since the outlines don't come together as the towers rise in the images above, our visual system is forced to assume that the two side-by-side images must be diverging—and that the tower on the right is tilting more to the right. And this is what you "see," no matter how hard you try to view each image as distinct.

Read the article at the WSJ or buy the book.

If this sounds familiar we covered the authors before in this excellent video explaining your brain's reaction to magic.

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