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Shapiro wins first place in international illusions contest

Aug. 24, 2005



Arthur Shapiro with trophy

LEWISBURG, Pa. - A visual illusion design by Bucknell Associate Professor of Psychology Arthur Shapiro won first place in an international competition being held in conjunction with the European Conference for Visual Perception in Spain.

"It is quite an honor and quite a surprise," Shapiro said from Spain. "It feels wonderful. It was a big show, a big production."

The announcement was made Wednesday, Aug. 24, and followed a competition in which as many 1,000 conference participants voted for the top three illusions from among 10 finalists who made five-minute presentations. The 10 finalists had been selected by an international panel of eight judges from institutions such as Harvard University and the California Institute of Technology.

"The illusions that were presented were truly exceptional," Shapiro said. "What it means is that I received more votes from my colleagues than anyone else which is really quite an honor."

The award ceremony was accompanied by flying confetti and was filmed by a documentary film crew.

By taking first place, Shapiro's design carries recognition as "Best Visual Illusion of the Year" and will be made part of the exhibition of the Science Museum of A Coruna in Spain. In addition, Shapiro is the recipient of a specially designed trophy from the Science Museum.

Shapiro's design, called Motion-Illusion Building Blocks, was developed with Bucknell student researcher Justin Charles and was one of 74 submitted to contest organizers. Judging was based on a series of factors, including significance to the understanding of the visual system, beauty, simplicity of description, and spectacularity.

Shapiro, who has been creating visual illusions since 1992, said the contest entry consists of a series of straight lines placed next to lights that change from light to dark. "The lines are physically stationary, but appear to move and distort in different directions. The illusion is compelling because we are able to fool the brain into acting as if motion was actually present," he said.

He said illusions help researchers to understand how motion is seen.

A sampling of Shapiro's visual illusion creations can be seen at his website at <http://www.shapirolab.net/>.

The international conference continues until Friday, Aug. 26.

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