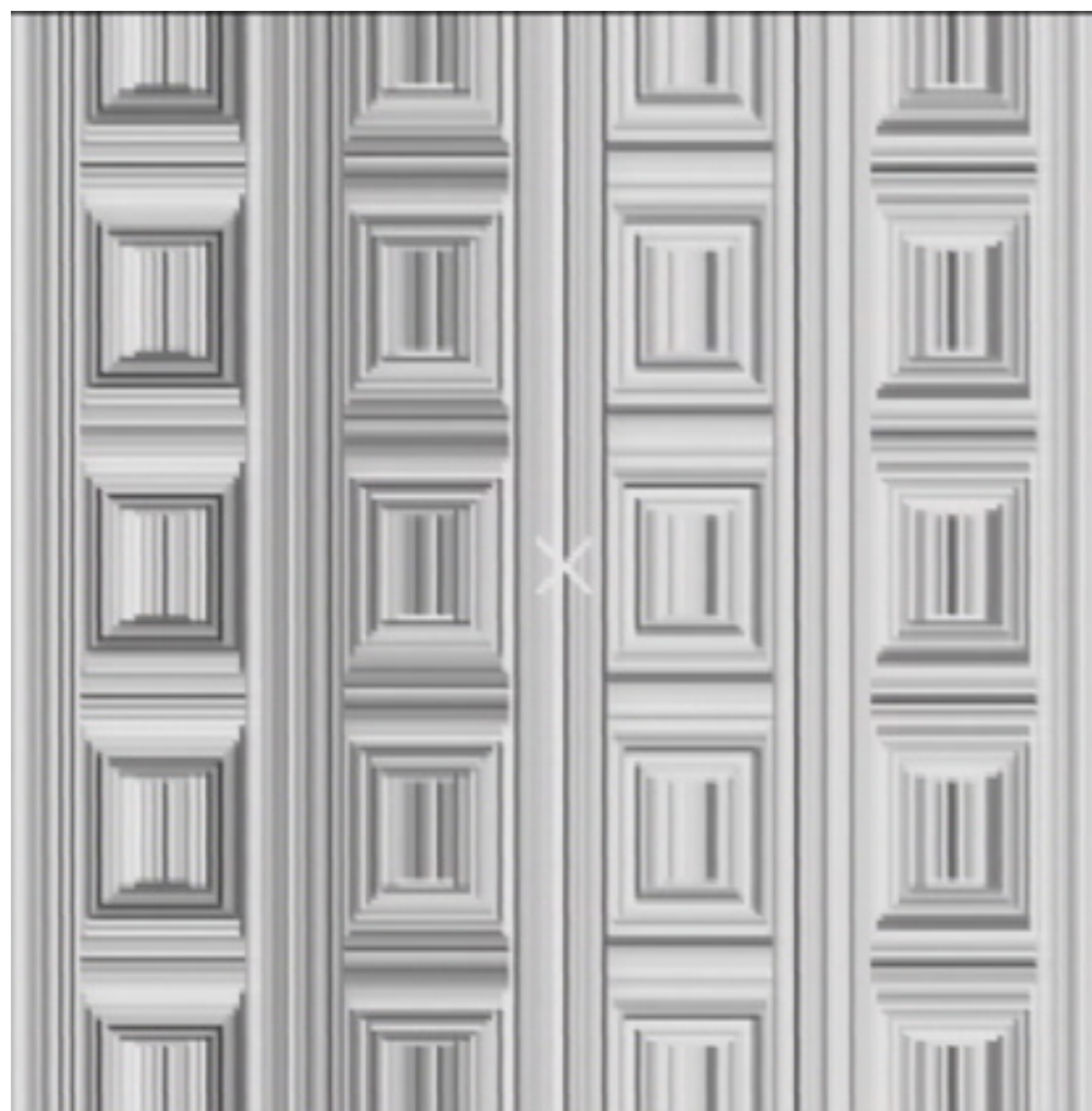


The Coffin Illusion

Tony Norcia, Smith-Kettlewell

- How many circles do you see?
- Advance to the next slide
- Interpretation and observations on third page.



First time viewers of this display invariably do not see the 16 circles segmented from the background. Rather, they see a series of rectangles that they frequently describe as “door panels”. The illusion pits segmentation cues against what appears to be a very strong prior to interpret the image as a series of 3-D structures “coffers” with closed boundaries. (A coffer is a decorative sunken panel.) It appears that the prior involves both closure and shape-from shading assumptions.

This demo has been shown to approximately 100 people with an average time to see the circles of around 45 sec. Some observers take much longer, but some notice the circles after only 10-15 sec.

The illusion works very well as a large-scale demo where various members of the audience “get it” over an extended period of time, with some members requiring explicit cuing with a pointer in order to see the circles.