

Ekroll, V., Forster, P.-P., Szymanski, D., & van Lier, R. (2025). The illusion of absence in the arts of magic and photography. Poster presented at the [Visual Science of Art Conference](#).

Abstract to poster:

The illusion of absence in the arts of magic and photography

Vebjørn Ekroll¹, Pierre-Pascal Forster², David Szymanski³ & Rob van Lier² (preliminary)

1. Department of Psychosocial Science, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway
2. Donders Institute for Brain, Cognition, and Behaviour, Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands
3. Artist, United States

The illusion of absence is a recently described perceptual illusion in which the space behind an occluder is experienced as compellingly empty. It has been proposed that this illusion plays a central role in many magic tricks and also that it may play a role in road accidents involving obstructions of view, such as the windscreen pillar. The same illusion also seems to play a role in the art of photography. The work of the Finnish-American photographer Arno Rafael Minkkinen, for instance, is replete with many stunning body illusions which seem to be due to the illusion of absence, such as his “Self-portrait, Jamestown, Rhode Island, 1974”. In this presentation, we provide various demonstrations of the illusion of absence from the arts of magic and photography and discuss them in light of what is currently known about the underlying perceptual visual mechanisms.

Acknowledgements

Supported by the Research Council of Norway, project number 334817.