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### Barrow study localizes visual awareness

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Health News

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Barrow Neurological Institute scientists in Phoenix say they've made a discovery that puts scientists closer to understanding how visual awareness occurs.

Stephen Macknik, a researcher in Barrow's neurosurgery and neurobiology departments, and colleagues discovered awareness of simple visual objects is generated in a small portion of the brain's occipital lobes.

Previous studies had ruled out lower stages of the visual system, such as the retina, as capable of generating visual awareness. Those studies left most remaining areas of the brain as potential candidates.

Now the Barrow study places, for the first time, boundaries within the visual system to localize a small area in which visual awareness is generated.

"Visual awareness is the feeling that makes the world seem visible," Macknik said. "In contrast to a visual reflex, visual awareness describes the conscious

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experience of recognizing a stimulus as visible, rather than invisible."

The yearlong study is detailed in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science.

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