

HOW ANAMORPHOSIS WORKS

There are two key physical ideas that explain the mechanism of perspective, and hence the construction of anamorphoses using perspective.

First, the idea that light travels in straight lines. Second, that we see an object because a ray of light travels from each point on the object into our eye. (Perspective is a “one-eyed” phenomenon—each eye is seeing a different picture of the world—hence my advice right at the beginning to close one eye when looking at anamorphoses.)

Put together, these ideas lead to the concept of a “cone of vision”: the millions and millions of light rays form a conical shape whose tip (where all the rays meet) is the eye. The idea is illustrated in this charming diagram by Abraham Bosse (1648), where three “perspectors” are looking at squares drawn on the ground:

