

The BBVA Foundation presents its Frontiers of Knowledge Awards at a formal ceremony celebrating science and the arts

- The event marks the coming-of-age of these international prizes, whose eight categories, rigorous selection process and combined purse of 3.2 million euros place them among the world's foremost award schemes
- Representatives of the international scientific community and high-level government institutions joined with leading figures from the worlds of business and the arts at a ceremony showcasing the achievements of science
- The awards recognize and reward human endeavor in confronting the great global challenges of our times. "They unequivocally bear the stamp of the present century", in the words of BBVA Foundation President, Francisco González

Madrid, June 18, 2009.- Quantum computers, the wounds inflicted on the Amazon rainforest, the fight against cancer, international cooperation, economic crisis, the Arctic thaw ... The presentation ceremony of the BBVA Foundation's inaugural Frontiers of Knowledge Awards, held this evening in the Foundation's Madrid headquarters, has been a whirlwind trip round the advances and challenges of science. The thrill of discovery, the value of basic research and, above all, the triumph of curiosity and human creativity were recurrent motifs in awardees' thank-you speeches.

The ceremony, under the presidency of the Minister of Science and Innovation, Cristina Garmendia, and the BBVA Foundation President, Francisco González, welcomed eminent members of the international scientific community and high-level government institutions alongside personalities from the worlds of business and the arts.

Their international scope, the eight categories addressed, the rigor of the selection process and a combined purse of 3.2 million euros make the BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Awards one of the world's most prestigious award schemes, as well as a celebration of human achievement. This first edition attracted institutions and researchers from more than thirty countries.

“These awards foster excellence in the knowledge fields that best characterize today's global society”, declared Francisco González. “They unequivocally bear the stamp of this century”. The eight categories addressed by the Foundation of Knowledge Awards include Climate Change, Deployment Cooperation, Information and Communication Technologies and Ecology and Conservation Biology - the first time achievements in these fields have been recognized through an international award of this stature.

The President of the BBVA Foundation emphasized that the name of the awards is a tribute to interdisciplinarity in scientific endeavor and the continuous expansion of the boundaries of knowledge. The Foundation, he went on, wants to honor the people and teams who have “changed the way we see and act in the world”, while addressing “the lack of explicit recognition for the achievements of the international research community”.

Spain's Minister of Science and Innovation, Cristina Garmendia, referred to the BBVA Foundation as “a benchmark institution in the promotion of world-class scientific and cultural production and its communication to society”, adding that “our applause here today should rightly go to the Foundation as well as to the awardees”. Garmendia also alluded to the work of her own department: “the BBVA Foundation and the Ministry of Science and Innovation share common goals with regard to scientific culture that can only spring from a profound democratic conviction: the commitment to keep citizens informed of the latest developments in science and technology, to procure their involvement, and to make plain the social and economic returns that can be earned through investment in knowledge”.

AWARDEES

The winners in the first edition of the Frontiers of Knowledge Awards were Wallace S. Broecker, in Climate Change; Ignacio Cirac and Peter Zoller, in Basic Sciences; Joan Massagué, in Biomedicine; Thomas E. Lovejoy and William F. Laurance, in Ecology and Conservation Biology; Jacob Ziv, in Information and Communication Technologies; Jean Tirole, in Economics, Finance and Management; Steven Holl, in Arts; and the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (MIT), in Development Cooperation.

Awardees were presented with a commemorative artwork created by sculptor Blanca Muñoz (Madrid, 1963), based on a series of spirals that represent the progress and interaction of scientific disciplines. The spiral, the artist explains, “is the best solution for growing in a small space and also conveys the idea of continuity”.

In their thank-you speeches during the ceremony, awardees looked back on the store of knowledge accumulated by humanity, but they also looked forward expectantly to emerging challenges and the fascinating secrets still to be yielded up by nature.

“KNOWLEDGE IS THE TREASURE OF HUMANKIND”

“My own career in communication started when, as a young teen I was fascinated with a popular book on Guillermo Marconi”, mused Jacob Ziv, the oldest among the 2008 laureates. “I was naive enough to think that I could build my own transmitter following the sketchy outline of Marconi’s transmitter”. In Ziv’s view, Marconi’s discovery of the wireless telegraph in the late 19th century was the starting point for his own line of research, Information Theory.

Peter Zoller and Ignacio Cirac see themselves as “representatives of the scientific community working in basic sciences. A community that tries to understand nature, to discover new phenomena and to find ways of observing them”. Both physicists belong to an “emerging area that deals with the extraordinary behavior of microscopic particles, which illustrates how basic science, apart from driving our curiosity and enriching our knowledge, may lead, in the long run, to important applications”.

Joan Massagué reserved special mention for one of the great challenges facing us today: “Knowledge is the treasure of humankind, and especially so as we face the challenges of our times. Challenges such as the conquest of cancer, one of the diseases with the biggest impact on our lives. As a participant in this quest, I am convinced that the community of scientists and physicians will reach this goal in the coming decades. In fact, the conquest has already begun”.

TEACHING YOUNG PEOPLE THE THRILL OF DISCOVERY

Another message conveyed time and again throughout the ceremony was the importance of teaching young people the thrill of discovery. In Jean Tirole’s words, “with these awards, the BBVA Foundation is signaling how crucial research is to the future of society. The Foundation will thereby encourage young talents to embrace scientific careers, which are so necessary to meet the present technological, economic, and political challenges”.

Francisco González also singled out the work of the prize juries whose “combined excellence” ensured “an objective and rigorous selection process”. The BBVA Foundation was partnered by the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) in the tasks of candidate preselection and the appointment of the eight prize juries, whose members, including various Nobel prizewinners, were drawn from the leading ranks of the academic, cultural and economic worlds.

The ceremony was presented by journalist Beatriz Ariño, and opened and closed with musical works by Joaquín Turina (1882-1949) and Jesús Torres (1965) performed by the Trío Arbós.

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