

Klosterneuburg, June 13, 2016

IST Austria Professor Peter Jonas receives Wittgenstein Prize 2016

The most important and most valuable science award in Austria brings 1.5 million Euro for neuroscience to IST Austria. Recognition and mandate for worldwide respected research achievement in brain research in Klosterneuburg near Wien.

In awarding Peter Jonas with the Wittgenstein Prize, the International START-/Wittgenstein Jury honored his present groundbreaking research in neuroscience.

The prize includes a funding of 1.5 million Euro with a maximum degree of freedom and flexibility for carrying out his research. In accordance with the program's objective, Peter Jonas intends to use the available funds for "high risk / high gain" research projects.

"Receiving the Wittgenstein Prize fills me with immense pride. My aim is not just to carry out my research largely independently from external constraints which comes with these financial opportunities, but I would also like to use the symbolic power of the prize to move neuroscience forward at the Institute and in Austria," says Peter Jonas in an initial response.

Synaptic communication in neuronal microcircuits

Peter Jonas—one of the world's leading neuroscientists—is particularly known for his contributions to synaptic signaling in neuronal microcircuits, investigating how synapses enable communication between neurons.

With approximately 10 billion neurons communicating with each other at a billiard of synapses in the brain, understanding the function of these neuronal microcircuits is one of the major challenges of the life sciences in the 21st century.

The Wittgenstein Prize funding will enable Peter Jonas to address another exciting question in neuroscience: the interrelation between structure and function of synaptic signaling. The goal is to detect the structural changes during synaptic transmission by combining optical stimulation and electron microscopic analyses. These studies will result in a precise picture on molecular, structural, and functional level of signaling at excitatory and inhibitory synapses. Peter Jonas aims to elucidate one of the fundamental questions in neuroscience in an interdisciplinary approach—in parts together with other research groups at IST Austria: the physical appearance of structural correlates of synaptic signaling and synaptic plasticity.

Pioneering spirit and courage to take risks

“I congratulate Peter Jonas on the Wittgenstein Prize 2016 who joined the Institute already in 2010 as our first neuroscientist, and I am pleased that he received this great recognition for his excellent and worldwide respected research from the Austria Science Fund FWF,” adds Thomas Henzinger, President of IST Austria and awardee of the Wittgenstein Prize 2012.

Peter Jonas, born in 1961, graduated in Human Medicine from the University of Giessen in 1987. After working as a postdoc in Giessen and as a research assistant in the group of Professor Bert Sakmann (Nobel laureate for physiology and medicine 1991) at the Max Planck Institute for Medical Research in Heidelberg, he was appointed Associate Professor at the Technical University of Munich. Jonas moved on to become Full Professor and department head at the Institute of Physiology of the University of Freiburg before joining the back then recently established Institute of Science and Technology Austria (IST Austria) in Klosterneuburg near Vienna. Peter Jonas was the first neuroscientist at IST Austria and thus formed the beginning of the successful development of a focus on neuroscience at the Institute.

Peter Jonas has received numerous awards in science. He is member of the German Academy of Sciences Leopoldina and the Academia Europaea, and recipient of the Adolf Fick Award and the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Award. He also is editorial board member of the prestigious journals Science and Neuron. Jonas is a two-time awardee of the eminent and highly competitive ERC Advanced Grand which he received in the years 2010 and 2016.

Link Peter Jonas: <http://ist.ac.at/de/forschung/biowissenschaften/jonas-gruppe/>

Link IST Austria: <http://ist.ac.at/de/>

Link FWF / Wittgenstein-Prize: <http://www.fwf.ac.at/de/forschungsfoerderung/fwf-programme/wittgenstein-preis/>

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IST Austria

The Institute of Science and Technology (IST Austria) is a PhD granting research institution located in Klosterneuburg, 18 km from the center of Vienna, Austria. Inaugurated in 2009, the Institute is dedicated to basic research in the natural and mathematical sciences. IST Austria employs professors on a tenure-track system, postdoctoral fellows, and doctoral students at its international graduate school. While dedicated to the principle of curiosity-driven research, the Institute owns the rights to all scientific discoveries and is committed to promote their use. The first president of IST Austria is Thomas A. Henzinger, a leading computer scientist and former professor at the University of California, Berkeley, and the EPFL in Lausanne, Switzerland.

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