

Beat: News

Four Americans received the Princess of Asturias Awards in three disciplines

Recognize the work and dedication

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USPA NEWS - Four Americans received this Friday, October 22, 2021, Princess of Asturias Awards in three disciplines. The awards returned to the Campoamor Theater in Oviedo, the capital of the Principality of Asturias (Northern Spain), after a year of restrictions imposed by the Coronavirus pandemic and at a time when Spain is about to reach pre-pandemic normality with crowded streets of people eager to see the Royal Family and the laureates.

The Princess of Asturias Awards return to the Campoamor Theatre this year, with stringent prevention measures and the same sense of enthusiasm as ever, to recognize the work and dedication of individuals and institutions whose efforts inspire us daily.

Gloria Steinem won the 2021 Princess of Asturias Award for Communication and Humanities. A prominent member of the American feminist movement since the late 1960s and early 1970s, Gloria Steinem gained notoriety with the 1969 publication of the article 'After Black Power, Women's Liberation' in New York Magazine. Gloria Steinem was born in Toledo (Ohio, USA) on 25th March 1934. She graduated from Smith College (Northampton, Massachusetts) in 1956, after which she spent two years in India on a fellowship. In 1960, she settled in New York and began working for Help! Magazine. In 1968, after having worked at the Playboy Club, New York in order to write an exclusive on the working conditions and wages of those women, she collaborated in the founding of New York Magazine.

As a freelance journalist, she wrote for Esquire and The New York Times Magazine, among other publications. In 1972 she co-founded Ms., the first feminist magazine, which was also the first to be created and run exclusively by women. She was one of its editors for fifteen years and still serves on its advisory board, a position that allowed her to play a prominent role in the sale of the magazine to the Feminist Majority Foundation in 2001. Over and above her articles and journalistic works, she has also been a dedicated feminist activist, taking part in different forums and in the founding of women's organizations, such as the National Women's Political Caucus, the Ms. Foundation for Women (of which she is a "founding mother"), the Women's Action Alliance, the Women and AIDS Fund, and the Women's Media Center.

As a journalist, Steinem has written about labour issues and minority rights and has covered demonstrations whose causes she has also publicly supported. In her role as an activist, Steinem –who is currently considered in her country as one of the most significant and iconic figures of the women's rights movement – has also stood out for her efforts in favour of the legalization of abortion, equal pay for men and women and the approval of the Equal Rights Amendment, as well as her fight against the death penalty, female genital mutilation and child abuse.

Gloria Steinem is also the author of several best-sellers. Among other distinctions, she has received the Penney-Missouri Journalism Award (1970), the Women's Sports Journalism Award (2004) and the Richard C. Holbrooke Distinguished Achievement Award (USA, 2015). Holder of honorary degrees from several universities, she has been distinguished with the first doctorate in Human Justice from Simmons College (USA, 1973), the National Gay Rights Advocates Award and the Eleanor Roosevelt Val-Kill Medal (2013). Furthermore, in 1993 she was included in the National Women's Hall of Fame, while the Library of Congress of the United States included her among its Living Legends in 2000. She was bestowed with the Presidential Medal of Freedom by Barack Obama in 2013. Rutgers University created the Gloria Steinem Endowed Chair in Media, Culture and Feminist Studies in 2017. New York Mayor Bill de Blasio proclaimed March 31, 2019 as Gloria Steinem Day.

The fight against the pandemic

Katalin Karikó, Drew Weissman, Philip Felgner, Uğur Şahin, Özlem Türeci, Derrick Rossi and Sarah Gilbert won the Princess of Asturias Award for Technical and Scientific Research. They have independently contributed to the development of some of the vaccines approved to date, all based on different strategies, but which have protein S as a common target. The year 2020 began with the onset of a pandemic that changed daily life and the world economy and ended with an extraordinary demonstration of the ability of science to deal with the problem, thanks to the first vaccines against the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, the cause of the COVID-19.

pandemic.

The protein S is present on the surface of the virus and facilitates its attachment to and entry into cells. Philip Felgner is a pioneer in the use of protein microarrays to understand in detail how the immune system responds to different infectious microorganisms and to identify the best antigens for use in vaccines and diagnostic tests. Moreover, in 1985 he discovered and developed lipofection technology, a strategy that consists in introducing genetic material into a liposome so that it can be delivered to and introduced into cells. This technology is present in lipid nanoparticles that serve as delivery vehicles for messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines against COVID-19.

On the other hand, Katalin Karikó, a pioneer in the study of the therapeutic possibilities of this molecule, is considered the 'mother' of this type of vaccine. Together with immunologist Drew Weissman, she began working on mRNA-based vaccines and saw that this molecule caused strong inflammatory reactions because the immune system detected it as an intruder. Both managed to introduce small changes in the structure of the RNA so that these reactions did not take place. This breakthrough laid the foundation for the use of RNA therapies and its results allowed Uğur Şahin and Özlem Türeci (BioNTech) and Derrick Rossi (Moderna) to develop the mRNA-based vaccines that have currently been approved against COVID-19 and whose use can be extended to different areas of medicine such as cancer, autoimmune diseases and tissue regeneration.

Finally, vaccinologist Sarah Gilbert is another of the researchers who have worked to obtain a vaccine against SARS-CoV-2. The vaccine she developed, Oxford/AstraZeneca, is another of those approved by European authorities to date and is based on an adenovirus that is used as a vector to introduce the DNA encoding protein S into cells, thus stimulating the immune response.

Philip Felgner was born in Frankenmuth (Michigan, USA) on 7th February 1950. He graduated in Biochemistry from Michigan State University in 1972, received his Master's degree three years later, and completed his PhD in 1978 at the same university. After postdoctoral work at the University of Virginia, he joined Syntex Research as a staff scientist. It was there that he developed lipofection technology.

In 1988, he became Director of Product Development and founder of Vical Incorporated. In addition to the aforementioned contributions, Felgner's findings led to the development of DNA vaccines, based on introducing the genetic material for encoding viral antigens into the body. He is currently Director of the University of California at Irvine (UCI) Center for Vaccine Research and Development and the Protein Microarray Laboratory and Training Facility, where he has studied the proteome of numerous infectious microorganisms and has begun to manufacture the first microarray of the human proteome. He is the author of more than 200 articles, which have been cited over 38,000 times, and holds 45 patents and an h-index of 74, according to Google Scholar.

Drew Weissman was born in Lexington (Massachusetts, USA). He obtained his Bachelor and Master's degrees from Brandeis University (USA) in 1981, where he majored in biochemistry and enzymology. He received his PhD from Boston University in 1987 and completed his residency at Beth Israel Hospital, Boston. He continued his studies at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and, in 1997, moved to the University of Pennsylvania, where he focused his work on the study of RNA and the innate immune system.

He is currently a Professor of Medicine at the Perelman School of Medicine at UPenn, where he carries out research on RNA and its application in the development of vaccines and gene therapy. Weissman is a member of the American Federation for Clinical Research, the Association of American Physicians, and the American Association of Immunologists. His work has resulted in several patents and he was joint recipient of the 2020 Rosenstiel Prize (USA), together with Katalin Karikó.

Award for Concord

José Andrés and the NGO World Central Kitchen won the 2021 Princess of Asturias Award for Concord. Having become one of the most recognized chefs in the world and after having travelled to Haiti in 2010 to provide humanitarian aid, José Andrés founded the World Central Kitchen (WCK) in 2012, an NGO via which he carries out various cooperation projects with the kitchen as the core element.

José Andrés and the WCK workers use their experience in the world of gastronomy to develop exemplary forms of humanitarian action, with a view to helping the most disadvantaged in the most extreme situations, as well as serving as catalysts for the group effort of actors from different fields in pursuit of a more just and sustainable society.

Other winners

Camfed, Campaign for Female Education, won the 2021 Princess of Asturias Award for International Cooperation. They hold a meeting with the students, chaired by Emma Álvarez, head of the La Ería state secondary school and a teacher for Spain's Institute for Peace and Cooperation Development. Marina Abramović, winner of the 2021 Princess of Asturias Laureate for the Arts, visits the Marina Abramović - Performative Video Works exhibition, a sample of eight of her works that she has personally selected for Awards Week. Teresa Perales, won the 2021 Princess of Asturias Award for Sports. And Emmanuel Carrère, won the 2021 Princess of Asturias Award for Literature.

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