

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Vilcek Foundation Awards \$500,000 in Prizes to Immigrant Scientists and Designers

The Vilcek Foundation Prizes in Biomedical Science and Design celebrate immigrant contributions to research and development, and to intellectual and cultural life in the United States.

NEW YORK, February 6, 2024—The Vilcek Foundation announces the recipients of the 2024 Vilcek Foundation Prizes. Comprising a total of \$500,000 in awards, the prizes align with the foundation’s mission and vision: To celebrate immigrant professionals in biomedical science and in the arts and humanities, and to recognize immigrant professionals’ contributions to intellectual and cultural life in the United States.

Since 2006, the Vilcek Foundation has awarded prizes each year in two primary categories: biomedical science, and the Arts and Humanities. In 2024, the Arts and Humanities prizes are awarded in Design. In 2024, four prizes are awarded each in Biomedical Science and in Design: one \$100,000 Vilcek Prize, and three \$50,000 Vilcek Prizes for Creative Promise.

The Vilcek Prize in Biomedical Science

The 2024 Vilcek Prize in Biomedical Science is awarded to Luciano Marraffini, who is the Kayden Family Professor at the Rockefeller University, and a Howard Hughes Medical Institute Investigator. Born in Argentina, Marraffini receives the Vilcek Prize in Biomedical Science for his pioneering research on the study of CRISPR-Cas systems in bacteria, and on the potential applications for CRISPR-Cas including genome editing. He is a member of the National Academy of Sciences, the American Academy of Microbiology and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

“The United States’ leadership in biomedical science and research is in no small part due to the contributions of immigrant scientists,” says Jan Vilcek, cofounder, chairman and CEO of the Vilcek Foundation. “The 2024 Vilcek Foundation Prizewinners exemplify the profound diversity of thought and innovation of immigrant scientists: From pioneering studies in cancer metabolism, to using pluripotent stem cells to grow transplantable organoids to treat chronic liver disease, to decoding the nature of CRISPR-Cas systems, their work has formidably advanced science and medicine, and is re-shaping how scientists and clinicians understand and treat disease.”

The Vilcek Prize in Design

The Vilcek Prize in Design is awarded to a designer whose career and work has had a profound impact in their field—not only to their clients and constituents, but to the students and mentees they inspire. The Vilcek Foundation is delighted to award the 2024 Vilcek Prize in Design to Ramon Tejada.

Tejada receives the Vilcek Prize in Design for his leadership and commitment to accessibility and decolonization in design practices, and for his pedagogical approach that centers collaboration, inclusion, and radical innovation. Born in the Dominican Republic, Tejada is an associate professor at the Rhode Island School of Design. He has taught at Pratt Institute, the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, Parsons/The New School and CUNY-Queens College.

“Ramon Tejada’s designs embody the power of design thinking to bring meaning and efficacy to form,” says Vilcek Foundation President Rick Kinsel. “His work as a teacher and mentor helps reframe questions about diversity and accessibility in design.”

The Vilcek Prizes for Creative Promise in Biomedical Science

The Vilcek Prizes for Creative Promise in Biomedical Science are \$50,000 prizes given to immigrant scientists and researchers under the age of 40 whose work represents a significant contribution to their field, and opens new avenues for further research and discovery. The 2024 Vilcek Prizes for Creative Promise in Biomedical Science are awarded to Gerta Hoxhaj, Tomasz Nowakowski and Takanori Takebe.

Gerta Hoxhaj receives the Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise in Biomedical Science for mapping the molecular links between signaling pathways and metabolic networks of cancer cells with a focus on identifying vulnerabilities that could be used to develop cancer targeted therapies. Born in Albania, Hoxhaj is an assistant professor with the Children’s Research Institute and the Department of Biochemistry at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center

Tomasz Nowakowski receives the Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise in Biomedical Science for the development of technologies to identify and track the regenerative capacity of neural stem cells and neural progenitor cells in the human brain. Born in Poland, Nowakowski earned his PhD in Biomedical Sciences at the University of Edinburgh and completed postdoctoral research at the University of California, San Francisco, where he is now an associate professor of neurological surgery and anatomy.

Takanori Takebe receives the Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise in Biomedical Science for developing vascularized three-dimensional human organoid tissue from pluripotent stem cells that can be transplanted in humans, paving the way for targeted approaches to intractable liver diseases. Born in Japan, Takebe earned his MD and PhD at Yokohama City University School of Medicine. He is an associate professor with the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center.

The Vilcek Prizes for Creative Promise in Design

The Vilcek Prizes for Creative Promise in Design are \$50,000 prizes that recognize immigrant designers under the age of 40 whose work represents an important contribution to their field and exemplifies the potential for design to change the way people interact with the world. Three Vilcek Prizes for Creative Promise in Design are awarded in 2024 to Wael Morcos, Juan Carlos Noguera and Maryam Turkey.

Wael Morcos receives the Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise in Design for his approach to typographic and graphic design that incorporates complex cultural and political histories to create socially relevant visual identities and campaigns. Born in Lebanon, Morcos is a founder and partner of Morcos Key; he is an alumnus of the Rhode Island School of Design.

Juan Carlos Noguera receives the Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise in Design for his equitable approach to product design, especially for his work to develop accessible wheelchairs and educational tools that democratize society by promoting social and scientific engagement. Born in Guatemala, Noguera is a professor of industrial design at the Rochester Institute of Technology. He earned his Master's in Industrial Design at the Rhode Island School of Design.

Maryam Turkey receives the Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise in Design for her practice that seeks to bridge cultural and societal divides while simultaneously challenging the status quo; through organic sculptural forms and surfaces she deconstructs gender norms, revealing a powerful humanity. Born in Iraq, she is an alumna of the Pratt Institute, and she was a MAD Museum Artist in Residence in 2019. Her work has been exhibited in galleries and at prominent art fairs throughout the United States.

The Vilcek Foundation

The Vilcek Foundation raises awareness of immigrant contributions in the United States and fosters appreciation for the arts and sciences. The foundation was established in 2000 by Jan and Marica Vilcek, immigrants from the former Czechoslovakia. The mission of the foundation was inspired by the couple's respective careers in biomedical science and art history. Since 2000, the foundation has awarded over \$7 million in prizes to foreign-born individuals and has supported organizations with over \$6 million in grants.

The Vilcek Foundation is a private operating foundation, a federally tax-exempt nonprofit organization under IRS Section 501(c)(3). To learn more, please visit vilcek.org.