

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Vilcek Foundation Awards \$250,000 to Immigrant Scientists

*The Vilcek Foundation Prizes recognize and celebrate immigrant leaders in biomedical science and biotechnology in the United States*

**NEW YORK, February 6, 2024**—The Vilcek Foundation announces the recipients of the 2024 Vilcek Foundation Prizes in Biomedical Science. Awarded annually since 2006, the prizes recognize outstanding immigrant scientists at the forefront of their fields, and celebrate the importance of immigrant contributions to scientific research and discovery in the United States. In 2024, the foundation awards \$250,000 in prizes to Luciano Marraffini (b. Argentina), Gerta Hoxhaj (b. Albania), Tomasz Nowakowski (b. Poland) and Takanori Takebe (b. Japan).

“With the 2024 Vilcek Foundation Prizes in Biomedical Science, we honor scientists who have made the bold decision to immigrate to the United States—and who, through their personal and professional journeys, have made important discoveries that benefit science, medicine and society,” says Vilcek Foundation President Rick Kinsel. “Since 2006, the Vilcek Foundation Prizes in Biomedical Science have been a way for the foundation to honor Jan Vilcek’s scientific leadership and legacy, and to build awareness of the importance of immigration for scientific research and discovery.”

“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 reshaping how scientists and clinicians understand and treat disease.”

### **Vilcek Prize in Biomedical Science: Luciano Marraffini**

The Vilcek Prize in Biomedical Science is a \$100,000 award bestowed on an immigrant scientist whose career achievements demonstrate a legacy of major accomplishment in their area of study. The 2024 Prize is awarded to Luciano Marraffini.

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. Born in Argentina, Marraffini is the Kayden Family professor at Rockefeller University and a Howard Hughes Medical Institute Investigator. He is a member of the National Academy of Sciences, the American Academy of Microbiology and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

## **The 2024 Vilcek Prizes for Creative Promise**

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.

Gerta Hoxhaj receives the Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise in Biomedical Science for her work on 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 2024 Vilcek Foundation Prizes**

In addition to the Vilcek Foundation Prizes in Biomedical Science, in 2024 the foundation is awarding \$250,000 in prizes to immigrant design professionals with the Vilcek Foundation Prizes in Design. The recipients of the Vilcek Foundation Prizes in Design are Ramon Tejada (b. Dominican Republic), Wael Morcos (b. Lebanon), Juan Carlos Noguera (b. Guatemala) and Maryam Turkey (b. Iraq).

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## **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](http://vilcek.org).