

## Awards for Austrian Scientists in the USA

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By Eva Stanzl

Washington DC. Three Austrian scientists working in the US were awarded the Ascina Award by Science Minister Heinz Fassmann on Saturday evening in the US capital Washington. The prize is awarded annually to domestic researchers for excellent scientific achievements in North America. The award went to psychologist and political theorist Claudia Leeb, physician Jelena Todoric and electrical engineer Andreas Pedross-Engel.

The award ceremony marks the end of the Austrian Research and Innovation Talks (ARIT), which this year took place in Washington DC for the 15th time. The Ascina Award is presented by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research and the Ascina Association (Austrian Scientists and Scholars in North America). The award recognizes young researchers for excellent publications at North American research institutions. The assessments of this year's 18 submissions from all disciplines will be carried out by the Austrian Science Fund FWF.

The \$ 10,000 "Junior Principal Investigator" Award went to Claudia Leeb, 49, for her book "Power and Feminist Agency in Capitalism: Toward a New Theory of the Political Subject" published last year at Oxford University Press. Claudia Leeb analyzes capitalist power structures that oppress working-class and minority women, as well as "moments in which the ability to act is possible" to oppose and rebel in total submission. "These are often moments of pain," said Leeb on the sidelines of the awards ceremony in front of journalists. The pain in turn makes a rethink possible, which makes it possible not to be subjugated. "Instead of reacting civically and running away, one founds a movement, a political collective," said Leeb on the sidelines of the awards ceremony in front of journalists. By way of example, Leeb could be described as moments when black civil rights activist Rosa Parks refused to vacate her seat on the bus for a white passenger and became the icon of the African American civil rights movement in the United States.

Leeb was born as the daughter of a worker and a cleaning lady in the Upper Austrian Vöcklabruck. She completed a doctoral degree in Psychology at the University of Vienna and a PhD in Political Theory at the New School for Social Research. Leeb is currently working at Washington State University's Pullman School of Politics, Philosophy and Public Affairs in Pullman, Washington, and will soon be working as an assistant professor. At the award ceremony, she thanked the Austrian state "for my training, which allowed me to come to America without being in debt." Of these, US students "only dream" in view of high tuition fees student loans have become necessary. Leeb's new book, *The Politics of Repressed Guilt: The Tragedy of Austrian Silence*, was published this year by Edinburgh University Press. It is a philosophical investigation of the handling of guilt in relation to Austrian National Socialism. The laureate shows how important it is for nations to deal with their past. Otherwise it will have an impact on contemporary democracy with the danger that the past will repeat itself.

One of the two € 7500 Ascina awards for "Young Scientists" went to Jelena Todoric (42). Todoric studied at the Medical University of Vienna and since 2012 has been working as a postdoc at the Laboratory of Gene Regulation and Signal Transduction of the University of California at San Diego. She received the award for a paper published in the journal "Cancer Cell" in 2017 about waste disposal in cells. Todoric was able to prove in the animal model that disorders of this cellular garbage collection in the development of pancreatic cancer is involved.

The second prize for young researchers went to Andreas Pedross-Engel (36) for a new generation of airport scanners, which reduces the burden of security checks. "You can go through without having to lay down everything and without stopping," said the graduate of the Graz University of Technology (TU), who has been working as a postdoc at the Department of Electrical Engineering at the University of Washington in Seattle since 2014. Pedross-Engel is honored for a paper published in 2018 in the journal "IEEE Transactions on Computational Imaging", in which he presents a 3D camera system based on active illumination with millimeter-wave electromagnetic waves. With these waves, which are harmless to humans, one can "make the hidden visible," he says. In the future, one could do without the moving antennas in body scanners at the airport. It would be enough for passengers to just pass the antennas and be scanned. On behalf of the US Transport Security Agency (TSA), a prototype of the system was manufactured.

The ARIT is an annual network meeting between Austrian experts and Austrian scientists working in North America, organized by the Office of Science and Technology Austria (Osta) in Washington DC on behalf of the Ministry of Science and Infrastructure. The Ascina network was founded in 2002 in Washington D.C. founded and has over 1200 members worldwide.