

The beauty of the universe, from above and below

The 2009 Lennart Nilsson Award is to be presented to American planetary scientist Carolyn Porco and Iranian photographer and science journalist Babak A. Tafreshi in recognition of their photographic work, which – each from its own perspective – recalls mankind’s place in the universe. The prize is the world’s most prestigious distinction in scientific and medical photography.

The annual Lennart Nilsson Award is presented in honour of the legendary Swedish photographer, who has been working with imagery at Karolinska Institutet in Stockholm for decades. Like Lennart Nilsson, this year’s recipients, Carolyn Porco and Babak A. Tafreshi, have captured worlds that are otherwise hidden from human sight.

The panel’s citation reads as follows:

“Carolyn Porco combines the finest techniques of planetary exploration and scientific research with aesthetic finesse and educational talent. While her images, which depict the heavenly bodies of the Saturn system with unique precision, serve as tools for the world’s leading experts, they also reveal the beauty of the universe in a manner that is an inspiration to one and all.”

“Babak A. Tafreshi’s photographs reclaim a night sky that most modern people have lost. He takes us to remote places where the stars still look like they did at the dawn of mankind. His work calls to mind the beauty of the universe and human life on our planet.”

Carolyn Porco was born in 1953 in New York. She earned her PhD in 1983 from the California Institute of Technology’s Division of Geological and Planetary Sciences. She is currently employed at the Space Science Institute in Boulder Colorado where she leads CICLOPS, the laboratory where images from NASA’s and ESA’s Cassini-Huygens mission to Saturn are processed, captioned and posted for public release. Carolyn Porco and her scientific colleagues have published numerous groundbreaking scientific papers about Saturn and its rings and moons, and have discovered six moons, several rings and jets of water ice erupting from the south pole of Saturn’s moon, Enceladus, all previously unknown to astronomers. She has previously worked with the Voyager probe and imaged Uranus and Neptune. Carolyn Porco is also a member of the group tasked with taking pictures of Pluto when it is finally reached by the New Horizons probe in 2015.

Babak A. Tafreshi, photographer, science journalist and amateur astronomer, was born in Teheran in 1978. His photographs from his expeditions around the world have been published in foreign journals, on TV and on the NASA website, and have featured in a number of international exhibitions. From 1997 to 2007 he was editor, and later editor-in-chief of the Iranian astronomy magazine *Nojum*. Babak A. Tafreshi is a member of the board of advisors of Astronomers Without Borders and a project coordinator for the International Year of Astronomy 2009. He is also the creator and the driving force behind TWAN (The World At Night), a project in which photographers from around the world capture images of night skies as seen above notable landmarks of the planet.

The Lennart Nilsson Award was inaugurated in 1998 and is administered by Karolinska Institutet. The university’s president, Professor Harriet Wallberg-Henriksson, serves as chairperson of the Lennart Nilsson Award Foundation and takes part in the selection of the prize winners, who are awarded SEK 100,000 (approx. USD 14,500). The names of this year’s winners will be announced at the Göteborg Book Fair in connection with a seminar entitled: Making the invisible visible. The award ceremony will be held in the Berwald Hall in Stockholm on 28 October to coincide with Karolinska Institutet’s installation ceremony for new professors. Lennart Nilsson himself will also attend the festivities.

Journalists are hereby invited to the ceremony. Please register by contacting Karolinska Institutet at pressinfo@ki.se.

For press photographs of the prize winners and of Professor Lennart Nilsson, see:
<http://ki.se/pressimages>

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