BACKGROUNDER 2024

THE ROLEX AWARDS FOR ENTERPRISE

# THE BEGINNING

The Rolex Awards were set up in 1976 by André J. Heiniger, then Chief Executive Officer of Rolex, to mark the 50th anniversary of the Rolex Oyster, the world’s first waterproof wristwatch. Intended to be a once-only celebration, the Awards drew so much international interest that Rolex transformed them into an ongoing programme that has, in the years since, supported 160 Laureates whose endeavours have made a significant contribution worldwide to improving life and protecting our planet.

Since their foundation, the Rolex Awards have embodied the company’s determination to contribute to the wider world – the ethos that now inspires its Perpetual Planet initiative. According to Heiniger, “We initiated the Rolex Awards for Enterprise out of a conviction that we had a responsibility as a company to take an active interest in improving life on our planet and in the desire to foster values we cherish: quality, ingenuity, determination and, above all, a spirit of enterprise.”

# IN DEFENCE OF THE PLANET

For the founder of Rolex, Hans Wilsdorf, the world was like a living laboratory. From the 1930s, he began to use it as a testing ground for his watches, sending them to the most extreme locations, supporting explorers who ventured into the unknown. But the world has changed. As the 21st century unfolds, the company has moved from championing exploration for the sake of discovery to protecting the planet and reinforced its commitment by launching the Perpetual Planet Initiative in 2019.

Amongst its growing pool of partnerships, the initiative embraces the Rolex Awards for Enterprise, an enhanced partnership with the National Geographic Society to study the impacts of climate change, and Sylvia Earle’s Mission Blue initiative to safeguard the oceans through a network of marine-protected “Hope Spots”.

# A UNIQUE PROGRAMME

The Rolex Awards are unique in several ways. Unlike most other award programmes, they are not designed to recognize past achievements – they are given for new or ongoing projects. Candidates must be aged 18 or over, and there are no academic or professional requirements, nor any restrictions on gender or nationality – anyone, anywhere, can apply for a Rolex Award. Laureates represents 51 nationalities and carry out projects in 65 countries, giving the programme a global reach. Candidates can apply in English, simplified Chinese and Spanish.

# CRITERIA FOR SELECTING THE WINNERS

To win a Rolex Award requires an original, visionary project that can benefit humanity and/or the planet, along with the skills and determination to implement it. The Awards are given to projects focusing broadly on: the environment; science and health; applied technology; cultural heritage; and exploration.

They are judged on their originality and the impact they have on the world at large, as well as on the candidates’ “spirit of enterprise”.

Five Laureates are chosen in each biennial edition of the Awards. Each of the five receives funding to implement their project and becomes a member of the network of Rolex Laureates, many of whom collaborate.

# HOW WINNERS ARE CHOSEN

The Rolex Awards are managed at the company’s headquarters in Geneva. All applications are analysed by researchers and the best entries assessed with the help of specialists in relevant fields (some 37,000 people have applied for Rolex Awards since the 1976 launch). A shortlist of applications is then judged by an independent, interdisciplinary jury of experts. The jury changes for each series of the Awards, and typically includes conservationists, doctors, educators and innovators, explorers and scientists. Judges have included Sir Edmund Hillary and Junko Tabei, the first man and first woman to ascend Mount Everest (in 1953 and 1975 respectively); global environment advocate Yolanda Kakabadse; astronaut Chris Hadfield, former Commander of the International Space Station; leading geneticist Steve Jones; and astrophysicist Brian Schmidt, Nobel laureate and renowned climate change advocate.

# DIVERSITY OF PROJECTS

The 160 women and men selected as Rolex Awards Laureates since 1976 include an extraordinary cohort of pioneers across a wide range of geographical locations and skills.

Laureates have featured archaeologists, architects, educators, engineers, entrepreneurs, explorers, filmmakers, geologists, medical doctors, microbiologists, mountaineers, phys- icists, primatologists, sociologists, veterinarians and wildlife biologists.

# IMPACT OF THE AWARDS

The tangible benefits of the Laureates’ projects are even more varied. In those directly related to the environment: 28 million trees have been planted; 52 endangered species and 32 major ecosystems protected, including 57,600 km2 of Amazon rainforest; hundreds of new species have been discovered; 53 challenging expeditions have been completed; and 49 innovative technologies have been developed for a range of applications.

Millions of people across the world have benefited from the Laureates’ award- winning projects over the past 48 years. Some examples are:

FELIX BROOKS-CHURCH, 2021 Laureate

American social entrepreneur Felix Brooks- church is tackling malnutrition in Tanzania by equipping rural flour mills with a “dosifier” machine, which adds critical micronutrients to fortify staple foods. He has helped more than seven million people across Tanzania avoid malnutrition without increasing costs for consumers.

HINDOU OUMAROU IBRAHIM, 2021 LAUREATE

Climate change and indigenous rights advocate Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, from Chad, uses indigenous peoples’ traditional knowledge to map natural resources and prevent climate conflicts in the Sahel. She brought together 100 local and indigenous communities to map their region’s resources, and their advice was adopted by the national government.

EMMA CAMP, 2019 LAUREATE

Marine biologist and explorer Emma Camp is finding ways to restore and protect damaged coral reefs by studying the behaviour and genetics of “ultra-tough coral survivors” she has discovered growing in conditions previously thought to be deadly to them. Her work may hold the key to repopulating reefs ravaged by a warming climate, acidifying water and other human-inflicted damage.

GRÉGOIRE COURTINE, 2019 LAUREATE

Neuroscientist Grégoire Courtine is developing groundbreaking bioengineering technologies to treat spinal cord injury. Courtine and his team recently developed the “digital bridge”, which re-connects the patient’s brain with the muscles of the lower body and is the latest breakthrough in their mission to help paralysed people walk again.

Laureates are pioneers and guardians of the planet who have the potential to reinvent the future. The new Laureates can be expected to continue this pioneering tradition and to demonstrate Rolex’s fundamental belief in always pushing the boundaries.

# 2023 LAUREATES

The 2023 Laureates of the Rolex Awards for Enterprise are five pioneers whose ambitious projects will help to improve lives while protecting the planet for future generations, from providing clean water in Kenya to protecting the mountainous forests of the Andes. Selected by a panel of ten world-renowned experts and leaders, the Laureates will receive funding and publicity to expand and develop their projects.

Constantino Aucca Chutas

The indigenous Peruvian biologist will be scaling up his community-centred forest ecosystem restoration and protection programme in the high Andes.

Beth Koigi

The young Kenyan social entrepreneur will be providing solar-powered condensation technology to 3,000 people in 10 communities in need of clean water resources.

Inza Koné

The Ivorian conservationist will be protecting a richly biodiverse forest in Côte d’Ivoire while safeguarding its endangered fauna and reducing poverty in the area.

Denica Riadini-Flesch

The Indonesian development economist will be expanding one of the world’s first regenerative farm-to-closet fashion supply chains, strengthening women’s empowerment and preserving local Indonesian cultures.

Liu Shaochuang

The Chinese aerospace scientist will be studying wild camels’ habitats in view of creating two new conservation reserves to save the last remaining wild herds.

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#Rolex #Perpetual #PerpetualPlanet #RolexAwards

# ABOUT THE PERPETUAL PLANET INITIATIVE

For nearly a century, Rolex has supported pioneering explorers pushing back the boundaries of human endeavour. The company has moved from championing exploration for the sake of discovery to protecting the planet, committing for the long term to support individuals and organizations using science to understand and devise solutions to today’s environmental challenges.

This engagement was reinforced with the launch of the Perpetual Planet Initiative in 2019, which initially focused on individuals who contribute to a better world through the Rolex Awards for Enterprise, on safeguarding the oceans as part of an established association with Mission Blue, and on understanding climate change via its long- standing partnership with the National Geographic Society.

An expanding portfolio of other partnerships embraced by the Perpetual Planet Initiative now includes: Cristina Mittermeier and Paul Nicklen in their work as conservation photographers; Rewilding Argentina and Rewilding Chile, offspring organizations of Tompkins Conservation, which are protecting landscapes in South America; Coral Gardeners, transplanting resilient corals to reefs; Steve Boyes and the Great Spine of Africa series of expeditions, exploring the continent’s major river basins; the Under The Pole expeditions, pushing the boundaries of underwater exploration; the B.I.G expedition to the North Pole in 2023, gathering data on threats to the Arctic; and the Monaco Blue Initiative, bringing together ocean conservation experts.

Rolex also supports organizations and initiatives fostering the next generations of explorers, scientists and conservationists through scholarships and grants such as Our World-Underwater Scholarship Society and The Rolex Explorers Club Grants.