



INTERVIEW with the European Vision Awardee 2010 Dr. Ronald Roepman

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Question 1: What was your first reaction, when you realized that you are the winner of the European Vision Award 2010?

I was pleasantly surprised and honoured, realizing that my research efforts have been positively recognized by the European vision research community.

Question 2: What was the important position of points for your own research career?

That's a difficult one to answer, because every day there are decisions to make that can carry their effect for a long time. My current career however wouldn't have existed without the continuous support of Frans Cremers, the winner of the first European Vision Award. He recruited me to the Nijmegen team in 1994, started as my Ph.D. supervisor together with Wolfgang Berger, and kept supporting my ideas to gain functional knowledge of retinal proteins by first dissecting their interacting repertoire in the retina. This switch of focus (from genetics to functional genomics) led to a temporary drop in publication output, which could have ended my career right there. Frans however noticed all the progress my group was making and generously included me in his grant initiatives, knowing what it takes to survive as an independent PI. Also, he kept supporting my position as junior group leader in our organization. Eventually, the investment paid off when our research lifted off. I am still very glad we interact on a regular basis within our department, and this often results in valuable research ideas. Winning this award three years after Frans shows that our research in Nijmegen is indeed making a difference.

Question 3: What are your research priorities for the next five years?

In the next five years, the recently awarded SYSCILIA FP7 project will more or less rule the research in my lab. This is a large scale integrated project in which we will take a systems biology approach to study cilia and ciliopathies. I am quite proud to coordinate this project together with my closest collaborator, Marius Ueffing, who is now (mostly) in Tuebingen. We have managed to recruit a multidisciplinary group of top scientists to study all aspects of cilia in health and disease, in order to develop bioinformatic models on different levels. Our efforts of the last 10 years in dissecting the retinal protein network now provides the conceptual basis of this project. This unique consortium allows us to switch to a higher gear and really move towards in depth knowledge of the ciliary pathways and associated disease mechanisms. We anticipate that this eventually will also lead to novel opportunities to treat (retinal) ciliopathies.



Question 4: What is the strategy in your research group to promote young promising scientists

I think that it is important that talented young scientists are allowed the freedom to make their own choices and develop a unique research profile which eventually allows them to apply for funding. I then see it as my task to guide them in shaping these choices into a format that is compatible with our academic environment. Importantly, I have to provide them with my continuous support whenever that's required. The only condition is that they have to be fully motivated to "go for it", and are prepared to go the extra mile whenever that's needed. So indeed, I can only promote them, they still have to take matters into their own hands.

Question 5: Dr. Roepman, the fairy godmother gives you three wishes for free. Would you tell us these three wishes?

Of course, when there are no further rules in this fairy tale, the most beneficial first wish would be to raise the number three to infinity... Like most people, I would then wish for world peace, a cure for all diseases, and an end to all suffering. On a smaller scale, I would already be glad if I'm allowed many more happy moments with everyone that's close to me. And of course many successes in Vision research...

THANK YOU FOR THE INTERVIEW