



Press release

## **The 19<sup>th</sup> Jean-Louis Signoret Neuropsychology Prize of the Fondation Ipsen is awarded to Prof. Giacomo Rizzolatti (University of Parma, Parma, Italy)**

**Paris (France), 2 December 2010** – The international jury under the presidency of Prof. Albert Galaburda (Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA) awarded on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010 the 19<sup>th</sup> Jean-Louis Signoret Neuropsychology Prize of the Fondation Ipsen (20.000€) to Prof. Giacomo Rizzolatti (University of Parma, Italy) for his work on cortical physiology and in particular his research on mirror neurons.

He is the world specialist of the motor system and its role in cognitive function. In particular, he has discovered the mirror neuron system using brain imaging techniques in humans and using recordings of single neuron activity in non-human primates. A mirror neuron is a neuron that fires both when an animal acts and when the animal observes the same action performed by another. Thus, the neuron "mirrors" the behavior of the other, as though the observer were itself acting. Such neurons have been directly observed in primates, humans and other species including birds. In humans, brain activity consistent with that of mirror neurons has been found in the premotor cortex, the supplementary motor area, the primary somatosensory cortex and the inferior parietal cortex. Some scientists consider mirror neurons one of the most important recent discoveries in neuroscience, in particular they might be very important in imitation and language acquisition. However, despite the excitement generated by these findings, to date no widely accepted neural or computational models have been put forward to describe how mirror neuron activity supports cognitive functions such as imitation.

Giacomo Rizzolatti graduated in Medicine in Padua. He spent then three years at Institute of Physiology of the University of Pisa. His subsequent academic career took place mostly at the University of Parma where, since 1975, he is Professor of Human Physiology. He spent one year in the Department of Psychology of the McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, and one year, as a Visiting Professor, in the Department of Anatomy of the University of Pennsylvania. Giacomo Rizzolatti has been President of the European Brain Behavior Society and Italian Society for Neuroscience. He is member of *Accademia Europaea* of the *Accademia dei Lincei*, *Associé étranger* of the *Académie des Sciences*, and Honorary Foreign Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Among his major awards are the Golgi Prize for Physiology, the George Miller Award of the Cognitive Neuroscience Society, the Feltrinelli Prize for Medicine 2000, the Grawemeyer Prize for Psychology of the University of Louisville. He received Honorary Degrees from the University Claude Bernard of Lyon, from the University of St. Petersburg, and from University of Leuven.

### **About the Jean-Louis Signoret Neuropsychology Prize**

Launched in 1992, this prize has been awarded by the Fondation Ipsen to many renowned specialists: Eric Kandel (1992), Jacques Paillard (1993), Rodolfo Llinas (1994), Stephen Kosslyn (1995), Alfonso Caramazza (1996), Jean-Pierre Changeux (1997), Edoardo Bisiach (1998), Joseph LeDoux (1999), Joaquin Fuster (2000), Stanislas Dehaene (2001), Deepak Pandya (2002), Uta Frith (2003), Hanna and Antonio Damasio (2004), Marc Jeannerod (2005), Faraneh Vargha-Khadem (2006), Alvaro Pascual Leone (2007), Elizabeth Warrington (2008) and Pierre Maquet (2009).

The jury members are: Albert Galaburda (Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA), President, Jocelyne Bachevalier (Emory University, Atlanta, USA), Laurent Cohen (Hôpital de la Salpêtrière, Paris, France), Branch Coslett (University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA), Richard Frackowiak (CHUV, Lausanne, Switzerland), Didier Hannequin (Hôpital Charles Nicolle, Rouen, France), Kenneth Heilman (University of Florida, Gainesville, USA), Bernard Laurent (Hôpital Bellevue, Saint-Etienne, France),



Kimford Meador (Emory University, Atlanta, USA), Michel Poncet (C.H.U. Hôpital Timone, Marseille, France), Donald Stuss (The Rotman Research Institute, Toronto, Canada).

### **The Fondation Ipsen**

Established in 1983 under the aegis of the Fondation de France, the mission of the Fondation Ipsen is to contribute to the development and dissemination of scientific knowledge. The long-standing action of the Fondation Ipsen aims at fostering the interaction between researchers and clinical practitioners, which is indispensable due to the extreme specialisation of these professions. The ambition of the Fondation Ipsen is to initiate a reflection about the major scientific issues of the forthcoming years. It has developed an important international network of scientific experts who meet regularly at meetings known as *Colloques Médecine et Recherche*, dedicated to six main themes: Alzheimer's disease, neurosciences, longevity, endocrinology, the vascular system and cancer science. Moreover, in 2007, the Fondation Ipsen started three new series of meetings. The first series is an annual meeting organized in partnership with the Salk Institute and *Nature* and focuses on Biological Complexity; the second series is the "Emergence and Convergence" series with *Nature*, and the third with Cell and the Massachusetts General Hospital entitled "Exciting Biologies". Since its beginning, the Fondation Ipsen has organised more than 100 international conferences, published 71 volumes with renowned publishers and 213 issues of a widely distributed bimonthly newsletter *Alzheimer Actualités*. It has also awarded more than 100 prizes and grants.

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