

PRESS RELEASE by **Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation** and **OeAW**:

## **OeAW and **Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation** establish new institute for biomedical artificial intelligence in Vienna**

**Michael Bronstein leads the new AITHYRA institute of the Austrian Academy of Sciences ++ **Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation** funds project with € 150 million**

**Mainz, 18 September 2024: The Austrian Academy of Sciences (OeAW) is further expanding its focus on life sciences by opening an institute for biomedical Artificial Intelligence (AI) based on a € 150 million funding from the German non-profit **Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation (BIS)**. The new institute, called **AITHYRA**, will make revolutionary advances in biomedicine by developing AI-based research approaches. It will make a significant contribution to the advancement of human health with the knowledge gained from working with AI. The foundation and OeAW were able to win **Michael Bronstein, DeepMind Professor at the University of Oxford**, as founding director of the institute. Two thirds of the funds required for the housing of the institute will be provided by the **Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research** and one third by a grant from the **City of Vienna**. The **Vienna Business Agency** has been commissioned to construct a new building as the institute's final location by the **City of Vienna**.**

### **Ground-breaking project of the **Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation** with largest private research funding to date**

The German **Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation (BIS)** based in Mainz is funding the establishment and operation of the **AITHYRA Institute** with € 150 million over the next 12 years. This is the largest private research funding ever seen in Austria. Together with the **Austrian Academy of Sciences**, the **Foundation** intends to establish an institute of excellence that is unique in Europe, in which researchers from the fields of AI and biomedical research combine their expertise from the start. Thus, the potential of AI for improving human health can be maximised. In the **Foundation's** search for a suitable environment, the **Austrian Academy of Sciences** and **Vienna** as a research location were able to convince the foundation in its competitive selection process.

### **AI offers hope in the fight against incurable diseases**

The **AITHYRA Institute** is the first of its kind in Austria and Europe. It aims to combine the best research approaches from the world of academia, research-based companies and start-ups and to work closely with Austrian and international universities and non-university scientific institutions. The goal is to gain a deeper understanding of biomedical interrelationships in order to better understand diseases, enable faster and more reliable diagnoses and support the development of treatments for currently incurable diseases. At the **AITHYRA Institute**, AI and life science experts will work closely together in a new way. AI researchers will be involved in biomedical research, experiments and data analysis from the very

beginning – not only afterwards, as has been the case until now. Research will be conducted according to the highest ethical standards. The results and data will be made available to all researchers worldwide in accordance with the principle of open access.

### **Oxford professor as institute director**

Founding Director Michael Bronstein studied computer science and completed his doctorate at Technion – Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa. Before becoming a professor at Oxford, he held a professorship at Imperial College London as well as visiting professorships at Stanford, MIT and Harvard. He has contributed to leading tech companies and is the successful founder of several start-ups. Bronstein is internationally recognised as an expert in the field of machine learning and has successfully applied research results in academic spin-offs. In the course of his career, he has received five grants from the European Research Council (ERC) to date. To complement Bronstein's AI expertise, a high-ranking international search committee is currently looking to fill the position of biomedical director at the institute. Anita Ender, Administrative Director of the CeMM – Research Center for Molecular Medicine of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, will take over the management of the AITHYRA Institute. As she will continue in her role at the CeMM, she will form a bridge to the medical Campus Vienna.

### **AITHYRA Institute located at Vienna BioCenter**

The AITHYRA Institute will be located in a newly constructed building at the Vienna BioCenter (VBC) in Wien-Landstraße. It will benefit from the successful life science environment of university and non-university institutes. In addition to setting up its own state-of-the-art AI-controlled robotics laboratory, the AITHYRA Institute will also have access to the VBC infrastructure, which will enable numerous synergies. Until the new building is completed, which will also house the institute, the Vienna Business Agency will provide the existing 'Marxbox' building in the immediate vicinity of the VBC.

### **Institute's name created in collaboration with AI**

To emphasise the forward-looking nature of the institute, the project partners have decided to take an innovative approach to the process of naming the institute. They have developed the name in collaboration with an AI. In doing so, they have made one of the institute's research principles the fundamental strategy in the naming process. To embody the spirit of AI and biomedicine, Greek mythology was used as inspiration and linked to the goals of the new institute – and AITHYRA was born. According to the backstory generated by AI, she is the daughter of Athena, the goddess of wisdom, and Asclepius, the god of medicine, and is therefore its patron saint and source of inspiration. The institute named after her aims to carry the history of biomedical research into the future.

**You can follow the development of the institute at**  
<https://www.oeaw.ac.at/AITHYRA>

**CONTACT:****Austrian Academy of Sciences**

Mag. Debora Knob, Media Spokesperson of the Presiding Committee

Tel: +43 (1) 51581 1209

E-mail: Debora.Knob@oeaw.ac.at

**Boehringer Ingelheim Stiftung**

Dr Stephan Formella, Managing Director Science & Research

Tel.: +49 (0) 6131 27508-12

E-Mail: secretariat@bistiftung.de

High-resolution images of the founding ceremony can be found at:

<https://boehringer-ingelheim-stiftung.de/en/what-we-fund/funding-initiatives/aithyra-institute/image-gallery.html>

**QUOTES:**

**Heinz Faßmann, President of the Austrian Academy of Sciences:** “With the establishment of the AITHYRA Institute, the Austrian Academy of Sciences is setting new standards in basic research together with the Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation. Vienna is becoming a center of biomedical AI research. With Michael Bronstein we have succeeded in bringing a real superstar of the AI scene to Vienna. Together with other institutions, he will help Austrian and perhaps even European research catch up.”

**Christoph Boehringer, Chairman of the Board of the Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation:** “AITHYRA will set new impulses for excellent science and create freedom as well the best conditions for outstanding researchers. With AITHYRA the Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation is taking the next step in its engagement for excellent basic research in medicine, biology, chemistry, and pharmacology.”

**Stephan Formella, Managing Director & Research of the Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation:** “The foundation aims to unite the research fields of AI and basic biomedical research in a new research institute whose work will be characterized by innovative approaches. We want the institute to offer the best possible framework for this research. We are very glad to enter a trustful, long-term partnership with the OeAW to realize this exciting and ambitious project.”

**Michael Bronstein, Scientific Director:** “AI will drive the biological revolution in the next decade with the ultimate goal to improve human health. AITHYRA will strive to combine the best of academic, corporate and start-up worlds, and will have a mixture of AI and life science experts. We will make AITHYRA the place where magic happens.”

**Anita Ender, Managing Director:** “Thanks to the budgetary planning security and our strong partners, the AITHYRA Institute can take off with high expectations and internationally competitive conditions. We are looking forward to a successful set-up phase.”

**Martin Polaschek, Austrian Federal Minister of Education, Science and Research:** “Founding the AITHYRA Institute is a milestone in basic research. The Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation's choice of location and the fact that Michael

Bronstein, an AI expert, has been recruited to lead the institute show how attractive and competitive Austria is as a research location. This institute will massively strengthen our research and healthcare location and contribute to greater resilience and independence in the area of key technologies. Through the combination of Artificial Intelligence and biomedical research, we expect visionary approaches to health research that will ultimately benefit the patients. I wish the institute, all partners and the institute director all the best and great success!”

**Peter Hanke, Vienna City Councillor for Finance and Economy:** “Vienna is undisputedly one of the largest life science locations in Europe. The current figures are impressive: around 41,000 people work in the more than 600 life science organisations in Vienna. The most important top 20 pharmaceutical companies ranked by global revenue are represented in Vienna and generate an annual turnover of more than 13 billion euros. And with the Vienna BioCenter, which represents a combination of top biomedical research, innovation and educational opportunities that is unique in Europe, we have an ideal environment for the new institute. I am doubly pleased with the choice of Vienna as a location: for the patients and for Vienna as a life science location.”

### **Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation**

The Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation is an independent, non-profit organization that is committed to the promotion of the medical, biological, chemical, and pharmaceutical sciences. It was established in 1977 by Hubertus Liebrecht (1931–1991), a member of the shareholder family of the Boehringer Ingelheim company. Through its funding programmes Plus 3, Exploration Grants and Rise up!, the Foundation supports excellent scientists during critical stages of their careers. It also endows the international Heinrich Wieland Prize, as well as awards for up-and-coming scientists in Germany. In addition, the Foundation funds institutional projects such as the Vienna-based AITHYRA institute combining AI and Biomedicine, the Institute of Molecular Biology (IMB) in Mainz, Germany, and the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL) in Heidelberg.  
[www.boehringer-ingelheim-stiftung.de/en](http://www.boehringer-ingelheim-stiftung.de/en)

### **Austrian Academy of Sciences**

The Austrian Academy of Sciences (OeAW) is Austria’s largest non-university research and science institution. Its statutory mission is to “promote science in every way”. Founded in 1847 as a learned society, today the OeAW has over 760 members, 27 research institutes and 1,800 employees dedicated to innovative basic research, interdisciplinary exchange of knowledge and the dissemination of new insights with the aim of contributing to progress in science and society as a whole.  
[www.oeaw.ac.at](http://www.oeaw.ac.at)