



## MIT MUSEUM PRESS RELEASE

Date: July 19, 2006

**Contact:**

Josie Patterson  
(617) 253-4422  
[josiep@mit.edu](mailto:josiep@mit.edu)

**MIT Museum Exhibition Of Simple Microscopes  
A First For An American Museum**

***Singular Beauty:  
Simple Microscopes from the Giordano Collection***

MIT Museum Main Gallery — September 1, 2006 - June 30, 2007

Cambridge, MA (August 2006)— On September 1, 2006, The MIT Museum will showcase the exquisite beauty of the simple microscope, the portable single-lens instruments first invented in the 17th century and made famous by naturalists such as Antoni van Leeuwenhoek, Carl Linnaeus and Charles Darwin. It is the first comprehensive exhibition of this instrument by an American museum.

MIT Museum Curator of Science and Technology, Deborah Douglas, underscores the value of displaying historical scientific instruments. “The microscope is one of the iconic instruments of the life sciences. While a display of this type is of great interest to historians and collectors of scientific instruments, what is less obvious is how fascinating these instruments are to those on the cutting edge of microscopy research. In fact, this show will feature images from six current MIT laboratories.”

The microscope may be an old instrument but it is still at the heart of many investigations today, from biology to materials science. “Connecting past and present is important to the MIT Museum,” adds Douglas. “We have just started a new initiative to collect and preserve the life sciences so I am especially pleased the museum could collaborate with Ray Giordano to create this exhibition.”

The exhibition features 127 instruments from the rich collection of Raymond V. Giordano. Along with Douglas, Giordano co-curated the exhibition and authored the catalog. He is the co-publisher and co-founder of *Rittenhouse—The Journal of the*

*American Scientific Enterprise*, as well as a charter member of the Scientific Instrument Society of London. A noted appraiser of scientific instruments and books (including the Harold E. Edgerton Collection and the Keuffel and Esser Company Slide Rule Collection of the MIT Museum), Giordano is the owner of *The Antiquarian Scientist*. He has collected simple microscopes for thirty years and created one of the best private collections of this instrument.

Commenting on his collection, Giordano says: "Besides this historical aspect, the simple microscope, in its many variations, is a pleasure to handle and study. Many surprises have arisen over the years of collecting; forms nowhere illustrated in the original literature or the catalogs of the world's collections have found their place in this collection. Clearly instrument makers used their ingenuity to advance the field, and importantly, to gain a competitive edge. Today we can marvel at their accomplishments - optical, mechanical, and aesthetic."

Independent Scholar Anthony J. Turner, one of the world's leading specialists of scientific instruments and author of an introductory essay for the exhibition catalog, observes that there is a significant misconception that the simple microscope was wholly eclipsed by the compound microscope in the early 19th century. In fact, story is much richer and more interesting according to Turner. He shares some famously derogatory comments by a few scientists but notes that the simple microscope continued to see significant use in the 19th century. The evidence of this fact is in the textbooks, filled with illustrations made by researchers using the simple microscope. It is also in the inventories of scientific instrument makers who continued to design and manufacture simple microscopes for a myriad of purposes.

*Singular Beauty* includes an amazing variety of the most ingenious instruments. Examples range from one of the early simple microscope of the type designed by the Dutch naturalist Antoni van Leeuwenhoek to the pocket instruments made by the American optical firm of Bausch & Lomb. Most of the instruments are tiny, some less than an inch across, but even the largest can be easily carried. These elegant tools are made of wood, silver, brass, ivory, horn and glass. In addition to the microscopes, the exhibition includes reproductions of illustrations from period scientific texts, catalogs, broadsheets and paintings.

A small display of images of contemporary microscopy at MIT will be on view in the gallery. This display was researched and co-curated by MIT student Iolanthe Chronis, Class of 2008, with the support of the MIT Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program.

**Opening Reception with a short talk by Anthony J. Turner**  
**Thursday, October 5, 2006**  
**5:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.**