

Rare Leeuwenhoek Bids for History

It has been brought to our attention that a simple microscope has been sold and history has been made. The *only* Leeuwenhoek microscope in private hands was sold at auction on April 8, 2009. Professor Brian J. Ford, a Leeuwenhoek authority who witnessed the event, says the auction at Christie's was widely publicized beforehand. But after the microscope was sold, little of anything has been said since.

The sale at London's South Kensington salesroom expected to fetch between \$103,040 and \$147,200. In less than four minutes, it sold for \$459,225! Christie's website reports that the microscope (Lot 88, Sale 5808) is described as:

A highly important Dutch silver microscope

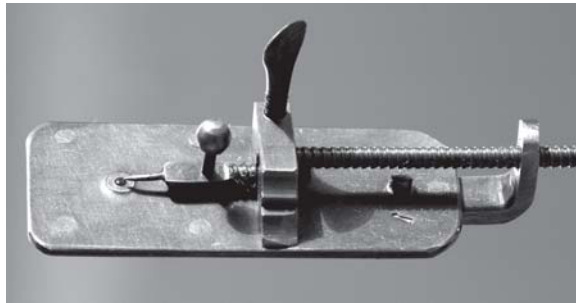
Antoni van Leeuwenhoek (1632-1723), circa 1690.

The lens held between two riveted silver plates; stage with rounded step design, specimen pin and focusing screw; main screw with rounded handle, with angle bracket and securing screw. Marked with an incuse 3, and two later Dutch sale marks (for the periods 1813-1893 and 1814-1831).

Dimensions of plates 39 x 22mm.

According to Christie's, the microscope was "Found in 1978 among a box of laboratory impedimenta from the Zoological Department of Leiden University and purchased by the present owner. Believed to be no. 62 in the 1875 exhibition catalogue by

Harting, and from the collection of the Dutch zoologist R.T. Maitland (1823-1904). Bought at an unknown auction between 1814 and 1831."



A Leeuwenhoek microscope similar to the one auctioned.

This must be the highest price ever paid for one of the world's rarest, original microscopes held in private hands and now owned by a private, anonymous bidder. Certainly, it is a treasure to behold.

But one can only wonder, who is the new owner? Is it possible that this prize microscope may soon make its way across the pond to a collection in the United States? Only time will tell. Brian, not missing the excitement (and falling short of the winning bid), took a cell-phone video of the entire sale. We are inviting him to show it at Inter/Micro 2009 in Chicago this July. So at least for now, this witness to history-in-the-making will be available for conference attendees, who are some of the microscope's most avid proponents. How appropriate.

For a complete description and images of the auctioned Leeuwenhoek microscope, visit Christie's website at www.christies.com.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary J. Laughlin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gary J. Laughlin, Editor