



## Compound Microscope and Case, Jacques Caffieri

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Gilt bronze attributed to Jacques Caffieri  
French, Paris, about 1751  
Microscope of gilt bronze, **enamel**,  
shagreen, glass; case of wood, tooled and  
gilded leather, brass, lined with velvet, silver  
braid, and silver lace  
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This compound microscope was made for an aristocratic amateur scientist, who would have used it in his *cabinet de curiosité* to explore the mysteries of the natural world. These cabinets were single rooms, or even an elaborate series of rooms, containing a variety of natural specimens including shells, fossils, minerals, bottles of preserved animals, and stuffed exotic animals including armadillos and crocodiles.

The Getty Museum's microscope still works, and the case is fitted with a drawer filled with the necessary attachments such as tweezers, extra lenses, and slides of such items as geranium petals, hair, fly wings, and fleas. Some of the slides are from the 1800s, indicating that the instrument was in continual use for over a century.



With attachments such as an **ocular micrometer**, the microscope incorporates the latest scientific technology of the mid-1700s. The design of its curving gilt bronze stand was the height of the Rococo style when it was created. A microscope of this same model belonged to Louis XV, King of France, and was part of his observatory at the Château de La Muette.

### About the Artist

Jacques Caffieri (French, 1678–1755)

Born into a family of sculptors and metalworkers, Jacques Caffieri became one of France's most important bronze casters during the reign of King Louis XV. As the nephew of Charles Le Brun, the chief designer and painter to Louis XIV, Caffieri had good connections as well as talent and rose quickly, becoming *sculpteur et ciseleur ordinaire des bâtiments du roi* (sculptor, bronze caster, and chaser for the king's palaces).

In 1740, Caffieri's wife bought a royal privilege—a form of permit from the king—which allowed them to gild bronze as well as cast it within the same workshop; these two processes would usually have been done by separate businesses. After his son Philippe Caffieri joined the

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workshop in 1747, they produced designs for chandeliers, ornaments for coaches, wall lights, and furniture **mounts**. Jacques was a master of the Rococo style, using elaborate curves, flowering branches, and fantastical beasts in his creations. His notable clients included the queen, Marie Leczinska; the king's mistress Madame de Pompadour; and one of the daughters of Louis XV, Madame Elisabeth.

### **Questions for Teaching**

Describe the objects you see. What did you notice first? Why did this catch your attention?

Imagine who would own an object like this one. Pay close attention to the case.

Can you tell anything about the person who used this microscope by the way it looks?

How does this device look similar to (or different from) the microscopes used by scientists today? How does it compare to a microscope you have used in science class?

Does this microscope appear to be more decorative or functional?

Do you consider this a work of art? What do you see that makes you say that? Does the fact that this object is also functional influence your opinion?

“Form follows function” is a principle that is related to modern architecture. Discuss this concept in relation to the microscope.