

BIOGRAPHY (JUNE 2016) - PROFESSOR ALAN CUMMINGS

Alan Cummings was born in 1950 in the northeast of England. He attended the local grammar school and worked in the pharmaceuticals industry for a year before going to Imperial College in London to study chemistry. His interest in art, music and literature developed at this point. Despite devoting more time to these than his science studies, he graduated and went on to three years of postgraduate study in the conservation and restoration of paintings at the Courtauld Institute of Art, London.



In 1974 he became a freelance restorer. Over the next 15-20 years he became an eminent member of the UK conservation profession. He worked for the National Portrait Gallery, National Trust, English Heritage and numerous other heritage organisations, stately homes and private collectors. He also engaged in teaching and lecturing and returned to the Courtauld Institute for a year to teach on the postgraduate conservation programme.

In parallel with his conservation work, Alan pursued a musical career. He was a prolific songwriter. He formed several bands and played regularly in well-known London music venues. In the early 1980s, with Perfect Zebras, he made two albums on the Polydor label and toured in the UK and Europe.

In 1988, Alan was appointed at the Royal College of Art (RCA) in London to lead a new postgraduate course in Conservation in partnership with Imperial College and the V&A Museum. He designed and led this programme for 12 years and this work was recognised in a Queen's Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education.

In 1998, Alan was appointed Head of the School of Humanities at the RCA. In 2000, he was awarded the title of Professor and was then appointed Pro-Rector (Deputy Head) of the College. In this role, he managed the academic life of what is widely recognised as the number one university of art and design in the world. His main interest towards the end of his academic career was helping to build better relationships between science, engineering, design and business as he believes such an interdisciplinary approach is the only effective way to solve world problems.

He retired from the RCA in 2011 and was awarded an Emeritus Professorship. He was also appointed as a Visiting Professor at Imperial College and a Governor of the National Film and Television School. For three years he continued to work as a consultant and lecturer and in 2014 he led a major project for secondary school children called "Designing The Future" that culminated in a big public exhibition of their work.

During this whole period, Alan continued to write songs and started performing again in folk venues. Finally "retired" in autumn 2014, he now takes his music very seriously. He leads an acoustic "pop-folk" trio called Little Beach, which performs his songs regularly and is acquiring a reputation in SE London and Kent. They released their first album, "The River and Other Tales" in February 2016.

Education:

- BSc (Hons), ARCS, Imperial College London (1968-1971)
- Postgraduate Diploma, Conservation and Restoration of Paintings, Courtauld Institute of Art (1971-1974)

Previous occupations:

- Freelance Conservator of paintings for National Portrait Gallery, National Trust, Government Art Collection, English Heritage and many other private and public sector clients in the UK (1974 – 1990)
- Postgraduate Course Director, RCA/V&A Conservation, Royal College of Art, London, UK (1988 – 2000)
- Head of the School of Humanities, Royal College of Art, London (1998-2000)
- Pro-Rector and Director of Academic Development, Royal College of Art, London, UK (2000-2011)
- Visiting Professor in the Faculty of Engineering, Imperial College London (2011- 2014)
- Governor, National Film and Television School, UK (2011 – 2016)

Current occupations:

- Director & Trustee, Creative Mentors Foundation, London, UK
- Songwriter, lead vocalist and guitarist with UK folk band Little Beach

Honours:

- Emeritus Professorship, Royal College of Art
- Fellowship of Higher Education Academy
- Fellowship of the City and Guilds Institute
- Fellowship of the Royal Society of Arts
- Entry in Who's Who since 2010