

**Roland H. Cunningham,  
Senior Paintings Conservator, retired,  
Smithsonian Museum Conservation Institute**



It is with great sadness we have to announce the passing of Ron Cunningham, retired senior paintings conservator at the Museum Conservation Institute (MCI), on August 16, 2014. Ron came to the Smithsonian's Conservation Analytical Laboratory (now called MCI) in 1982 from the Hartford Athenaeum, where he was already an established presence in the paintings conservation community. As a student at New York University, Ron originally planned to attend medical school—he had the meticulousness, the stamina, and the wit to do it, but he found blood was unpleasant to deal with—and then he found conservation. What medicine lost, the conservation field gained—a wonderful comrade, a thoughtful and helpful colleague, a great paintings conservator, with oceans of friends. When the Arno overflowed its banks, carrying mud and heating oil into Florentine churches, museums, and libraries, many conservators and conservation students went over to help. A few were asked to stay on and help complete the post-emergency, actual treatments. Ron was one of the few.

His career in conservation was marked by many such twists and turns, though on the face of it his life was calm. His marriage to Susan Mansfield flourished for forty years with motorcycles (his), two

charming sons, Scott and Ross, and one granddaughter, Jane-Rayne. The treatment-oriented Conservation Analytical Laboratory metamorphosed into the Smithsonian Center for Materials Research and Education, where research on pigments and analytical work was the norm, and more recently to the Museum Conservation Institute with a range of concentrations. Ron quietly moved into areas that challenged others, operating equipment that required finesse (because it was so old it could have been accessioned into the Smithsonian collection or because it required so much care and precision to operate successfully).

Ron radiographed all the space suits for the NASM curator, Amanda Young—so successfully they became a popular exhibition in their own right. When NASA PhD's convened at MCI to examine the National Air and Space Museum (NASM) collection of Apollo spacesuits, Ron was delighted to help. However, the NASA scientists came only two days after the new scanning electron microscope (SEM) with its glitzy new large vacuum-chamber was up and running. Ron had never used this SEM before, but everyone took it for granted that he would deliver perfect images and, with a smile, he did.

From the Arno to the Potomac and many places in between, Ron Cunningham was the colleague everyone wanted to have next door. He retired from the Smithsonian in 2010 and remained in the Washington suburbs. His illness from cancer was of short duration, but we will miss him for a long time. Further arrangements will be announced later.

#### Abridged biography

1962 BA New York University

Additional studies: New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, Conservation Center

#### Research Specialties and Interests:

- Inorganic characterization of paints, pigments and archaeological materials
- Technical studies of artists' materials and techniques on canvas, panel paintings, and polychromed wood sculptures

#### Publications:

Ballard, Mary W., Alden, Harry, Cunningham, Roland H., Hopwood, Walter, Koles, Joseph and Dussubieux, Laure. "Appendix 8: Preliminary Analyses of Textiles Associated with the Wooden Furniture of Tumulus MM" *The Gordion Wooden Objects, Volume 1 The Furniture from Tumulus MM* by E. Simpson. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010. pp. 203-223.

Alden, H.A., Cunningham, R.H., Ryan, K., Jantzen, P.T. and Dobbins, D.R. "Objects Worthy of Notice: Microscopical Anatomy of Selected Plants Collected by The Lewis & Clark Expedition." *Microscopy Today*, 13:3(2005): 8-17.

Chemello, Claudia G., Brostoff, Lynn B., Cunningham, Roland H. and Beaubien, Harriet F. "Characterization of metal corrosion products from Kaman-Kalehoyuk Turkey by energy dispersive x-ray spectroscopy (EDS) and x-ray diffraction (XRD): Part 1. Five copper alloy fibulae." *Kaman-Kalehoyuk 14, Anatolian Archaeological Studies XIV* (2005) pp. 211-222.

Dussubieux, Laure, Naedel, Dan, Cunningham, Roland, Alden, Harry and Ballard, Mary W. "Accuracy, precision and investigation: mordant analysis on antique textiles by various methods," *Preprints of the 14th Triennial Meeting ICOM Committee for Conservation, The Hague, 12-16 September 2005*, Volume 2. pp. 898-903.

Erhardt, W. D., Cunningham, Roland H. and Rasanen, Sirpa. "Extraction of material from oil paints by solvents," *Materials Issues in Art and Archaeology VI: Symposium held November 26-30, 2001, Boston, Massachusetts, USA. Materials Research Society Symposium Proceedings Volume 712* ed. Pamela B. Vandiver, Goodway, Martha and Mass, Jennifer L. Warrendale, PA: Materials Research Society, 2002. pp. 43-52.

Bishop, Ronald L., Canouts, Veletta, Cunningham, Roland H., and Reents-Budet, Dorie. "Ceramic technology, composition, and archaeological interpretation: examples from the Americas," *The ceramics cultural heritage: proceedings of the international symposium "The Ceramics Heritage" of the 8th CIMTEC-World Ceramics Congress and Forum on New Materials, Florence, Italy, June 28-July 2, 1994*. Faenza: TECHNICA, 1995. pp. 111-122.

Tsang, Jia-sun and Cunningham, Roland C. 1991. "Some Improvements in the Study of Cross-sections," *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation*, 30 (1991): 1-14.

Alexander, Ingrid C., Olin, Jacqueline S., Cunningham, Roland H., and Cheng, Yu-Tarng. "Condition, change and complexity: new interpretations of Albert Pinkham Ryder's paintings," *Paintings Specialty Group Annual, Vol. 3: Papers presented at the 18th annual meeting of the AIC in Richmond, Virginia, May 29-June 3, 1990*. Washington, DC: AIC, pp. 1-8.

Tsang, Jia-sun and Cunningham, Roland H. "Some Improvements in the Study of Cross-Sections," *Abstracts of Papers Presented at the Seventeenth Annual Meeting, Cincinnati, May 31-June 4, 1989*. Washington, DC: American Institute for Conservation, pp. 20-21.

Interesting projects:

Radiography of Spacesuits for NASM (these are just a few sites with images)

<http://airandspace.si.edu/exhibitions/suited-for-space/>

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/07/pictures/130726-space-xrays-spacesuits-science-nasa/>

<http://www.businessinsider.com/x-ray-images-of-spacesuits-2013-7>

<http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2013/07/ behold-the-innards-of-a-spacesuit/278251/>

<http://www.freewnewspos.com/news/article/b/573774/39%20Suits/pictures-what-39-s-inside-a-space-suit-x-rays-reveal-all>

<http://mashable.com/2013/08/20/nasa-spacesuit-smithsonian/>

<http://sci-universe.tumblr.com/post/65478804163/x-ray-visions-of-an-experimental-space-suit-made>

<http://www.chemheritage.org/discover/media/magazine/articles/32-2-suited-for-space.aspx>

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