

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of East Anglia		
Unit of Assessment: 25 - Area Studies		
Title of case study: Fiji in the World: national heritage activated, re-appreciated and re-valued		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: Between 2000 and 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Steven Hooper	Director, Sainsbury Research Unit for the Arts of Africa, Oceania & the Americas	1988 to present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: Between August 2013 and December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>The material heritage of Fiji is preserved in numerous museums around the world, notably in the UK, continental Europe, North America and Fiji. Since 2011, research, exhibitions and publications on these little-known collections by Professor Hooper and his UEA team have revealed their extent and significance, leading to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Enhanced public understandings and appreciation of Fiji's rich cultural heritage, including at the highest political and diplomatic levels in Fiji and the UK; 2) The raising of Fiji Museum's national and international profile, resulting in plans for the total renovation of Fiji's national museum; 3) The revival of traditional Fijian canoe-building skills, leading to inter-generational skills transfer and the display of a traditional Fijian canoe as an icon of carbon-free transport during Fiji's Presidency of COP23 in 2017. 		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Steven Hooper and his Fijian Art research team have, since 2011, examined and analysed extensive Fijian collections in over 40 museums in the UK, continental Europe, North America and Fiji (3.4, 3.5). This built on a previous AHRC-funded research project, <i>Polynesian Visual Arts</i>, and its major touring exhibition and book <i>Pacific Encounters: Art & Divinity in Polynesia 1760-1860</i> (British Museum Press, University of Hawai'i Press, Te Papa Press (NZ), 2006; Musées Nationaux Paris, 2008).</p> <p>A wealth of documented material was uncovered, providing crucial evidence of how Fijian objects embodied two key types of relationship: (1) gift exchange relationships among Fijians – as objects circulated among kin and between chiefdoms – and (2) exchange/trade relationships between Fijians and visitors, notably European traders, missionaries and colonialists (Britain was the colonial power 1874-1970). Internal Fijian relations were mediated and sustained by gift exchanges of a range of local products, including decorated barkcloths, mats, fibre skirts, kava bowls, weapons, canoes and whale ivory valuables. These pre-existing exchange practices in turn influenced how, in the 19th and 20th centuries, objects were deployed by eminent chiefs such as Seru Cakobau to manage relations with outsiders via strategic exchanges, diplomatic gifts and sale. This analysis challenges over-simplistic approaches that characterise 'collecting' in the Pacific as colonialist appropriation, as this view denies Fijians' agency in the tactical deployment of their own products to further their interests. As evidence, analysis showed that whereas weapons and textiles were traded freely with Europeans from the early 19th century, items made of whale ivory were withheld from such exchanges until the 1870s (3.1, 3.2).</p> <p>While this forensic research into the micro-histories of museum collections uncovered complex relationships, mediated by and embodied in objects, art-historical approaches also revealed a</p>		

much more dynamic picture of Fijian creativity than previously recognised. For example, in the early 19th century craftspeople responded to the availability of metal tools by building enormous sailing canoes (over 30m long) and by developing new and more elaborate forms of chiefly regalia using increased supplies of whale teeth obtained from European traders (3.2). The extent of this Fijian creative adaptability and exchange-based culture has been highlighted in international exhibitions and publications (3.1, 3.2, 3.3).

Research on UK and other Fiji collections involved collaboration between researchers at UEA and curatorial staff at the Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology, University of Cambridge, which holds over 3,500 Fijian objects. The team included PI (UEA) Professor Steven Hooper, who first conducted fieldwork in Fiji in 1977; Co-Is Dr Karen Jacobs (UEA) and Dr Anita Herle (Cambridge); RAs Dr Andy Mills (UEA) and Dr Lucie Carreau (Cambridge) and Admin Assistant Ms Katrina Igglesden, a UEA PhD student of Fijian heritage. Project partners were Fiji Museum, the British Museum, National Museums Scotland, Pitt Rivers Museum University of Oxford, World Museum Liverpool, Maidstone Museum, Musée du quai Branly Paris, National Museum of Natural History/Smithsonian Institution Washington DC and Peabody Essex Museum Salem, USA (3.4). In 2015 and 2016 the AHRC selected project research to feature in two of their research and impact publications, and on their website (5.6).

Additional impact was facilitated by an AHRC/ODA Follow-on-Funding project, *Fiji's Artistic Heritage: impact and engagement in Fiji* (3.5), run by the UEA team (Hooper, Jacobs and Igglesden). This was in collaboration with Fiji Museum and the iTaukei Trust Fund Board (a Fijian cultural organisation), whose staff visited the UK for museological training and who subsequently undertook exhibition and heritage projects in Fiji.

3. References to the research

3.1. *Fiji: Art & Life in the Pacific*

Steven Hooper, Fiji Museum and UEA. *Sainsbury Research Unit for the Arts of Africa, Oceania & the Americas, University of East Anglia*, (2016), 288pp. ISBN: 9780946009695.

3.2. Supreme among our Valuables; whale teeth tabua, chiefship and power in Eastern Fiji.

Steven Hooper

The Journal of the Polynesian Society, (2013) Vol. 122, No. 2, Special Issue: Tabua and Tapua: Whale Teeth in Fiji and Tonga, pp. 103-160. (saved on file at UEA)

3.3. *Fiji: Art & Life in the Pacific*.

Exhibition curated by **S. Hooper, K. Jacobs** and **K. Igglesden**;

Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, UEA, Norwich (15/10/2016 – 12/2/2017)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), USA (15/12/2019 – 2/05/2021).

Grants

3.4. *Fijian Art: political power, sacred value, social transformation & collecting since the 18th century*.

PI: Steven Hooper

Funder: AHRC research project. Dates: 2011-2014.

Grant value: GBP605,166.99.

3.5. *Fiji's Artistic Heritage: impact & engagement in Fiji*

PI: Steven Hooper

Funder: AHRC/ODA Follow-on-Funding. Dates: 2016-2017.

Grant value: GBP76,555.85.

4. Details of the impact

Among the most important impacts of the underpinning research and its dissemination via exhibitions, publications and canoe projects has been increased understanding and appreciation of Fiji's rich cultural heritage at all levels of society, within and beyond Fiji.

Enhanced understandings and appreciation of Fiji's cultural heritage, including at the highest political and diplomatic levels.

As research revealed the range and quality of Fijian collections, Hooper was approached to curate a large-scale exhibition of a kind not attempted before. This resulted in *Fiji: Art & Life in the Pacific*, co-curated with UEA colleagues at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts between 2016 and 2017 and later at Los Angeles County Museum of Art from 2019 until 2021 (3.3; 5.6, 5.7). Fiji's High Commissioner to the UK, [REDACTED], served on the *Fijian Art* project's Advisory Board (between 2011 and 2014) and visited UEA and Cambridge (which holds important Fijian collections). He then brought the President of Fiji (2012) and the Fiji Prime Minister (2012, 2013) on further visits hosted by project staff. He and these eminent guests had no idea of the wealth of collections in the UK and only limited knowledge of the high-quality contents of their own national museum – then a somnolent institution. [REDACTED] successor as High Commissioner, [REDACTED], accompanied the Fiji President and Her Majesty The Queen when they accepted invitations respectively to open and visit the *Fiji* exhibition in 2016 and 2017. He wrote:

“My predecessor [REDACTED] told me of the remarkable treasures you had shown him, and how His Excellency the President and the Honourable Prime Minister had both been astonished at their extent and quality. Their visits to museums with you certainly caused them to reflect on our national collections in Fiji Museum, and how Fiji's unique cultural heritage should be given greater prominence at home and abroad. For me, accompanying His Excellency the President and Her Majesty The Queen to your Fiji exhibition are highlights of my tenure as Fiji High Commissioner. Your work has encouraged us in the High Commission to prioritise cultural initiatives. These include the Fiji UK Culture project which you, Dr Jacobs and Dr Igglesden have so generously initiated and supported, and which is reconnecting our UK-based Fijian diaspora, especially the children, with their home culture and language” (5.1).

UK-based Fijian visitors to the exhibition were likewise astonished at the range and quality of their heritage materials, previously unknown to them. A typical response was by [REDACTED]:

“My children and I had no idea about all these wonderful things and about our history shown in the exhibition... Thank you so much. It was a revelation and made us all proud especially myself. I come from an island where we used to build canoes, so to see the beautiful drua, and to know that Her Majesty has seen it, made me happy and a bit sad at the same time knowing that my relatives don't built [sic] them anymore, but perhaps they will again if they know how much people admire them” (5.2).



UK-based Fijians visiting the *Fiji* exhibition at the Sainsbury Centre, UEA, February 2017

Acclaim for the UEA exhibition attracted the attention of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California's largest museum, whose Deputy Director visited Norwich and proposed that the exhibition be toured to LA. The Fiji Prime Minister accepted an invitation from Hooper to open that exhibition on 15 December 2019 and, as a consequence of COVID-19, its run has been extended until May 2021 (5.7).

Hooper has also advised successive UK High Commissioners to Fiji on cultural matters. Melanie Hopkins emphasised their increasing focus on culture and education and credited Hooper in a Fiji TV interview.

“I got to spend time with some of the people in the UK who really care about Fiji... People who have a particular career interest or anchor around Fiji. The one I will never forget is Professor Steven Hooper from the University of East Anglia, who has Fiji in his blood. He is the world authority on Fiji customs and traditions, and he was one of the masterminds behind the exhibition on Fiji ‘Art and Life’ that took place at the University of East Anglia in 2016” (5.9).

The raising of Fiji Museum’s international profile, leading to plans for the total renovation of Fiji’s national museum.

A significant aspect of the UEA and LA exhibitions was the loan of 32 rare pieces from Fiji Museum. The museum had not previously made international loans and their inclusion has significantly raised their profile at home and abroad. Museum staff members visited the UK during the AHRC-funded projects and the UEA *Fiji* exhibition – Fiji Museum being a project partner. During a UK visit the Fiji Prime Minister asked Hooper to prepare a plan to develop Fiji Museum and in 2016 he was appointed an Honorary Adviser to the museum. In 2017, with the Director, he undertook a comprehensive review with 18 staff that has provided a basis of the museum’s current Strategic Plan. Alongside other project initiatives undertaken at Fiji Museum, including exhibitions such as *Art & the Body* and *Kamunaga: The Story of Tabua*, the loans to the Los Angeles *Fiji* exhibition led to discussions in December 2019 between the owners of Fiji Water (exhibition sponsors totalling USD600,000) and Hooper, Igglesden and the Fiji Museum Board Chair and Director. These resulted in an offer from Fiji Water of USD25,000,000 to fund the total renovation of Fiji Museum, including provision for running costs to ensure sustainability. A costed proposal to transform the museum’s ability to serve the nation and overseas visitors, substantially authored by Hooper, has been submitted to Fiji Water. Covid-19 has delayed plans, but it is anticipated these works can commence in late 2021 or early 2022 and that Hooper and the UEA team will play major roles in planning and delivery. In July 2020 the Chair of the Fiji Museum Board of Trustees wrote to Hooper:

“Your research project and exhibition, with the Fiji Museum loans and other work you and your colleagues have done with the museum, has set off a chain reaction that has led to this exciting development for our national museum... the research projects that you have run, and especially the international exhibitions, have been of tremendous assistance in giving our staff professional experience... It is also excellent news that HE the President, after he opened your Fiji exhibition in Norwich and our Kamunaga exhibition here at Fiji Museum, has agreed to be official Patron of Fiji Museum” (5.3).

In October 2020, at Hooper’s invitation and on the 50th anniversary of Fiji’s Independence, the Directors of the British Museum, National Museums Scotland, the Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology Cambridge and the Pitt Rivers Museum Oxford wrote to the Fiji Museum Director proposing collaborative MOUs and assistance with Fiji Museum’s development (5.10).

The revival and transfer of traditional Fijian canoe-building skills.

Hooper’s idea for a canoe to be a dramatic feature of the *Fiji* exhibition led him to seek out the few remaining specialists capable of building a high-quality traditional double-hulled sailing vessel. Such a canoe had not been made for decades and the builders studied the only remaining ancient example in Fiji Museum. Hooper organised the commission of an 8m canoe for exhibition, made to the highest traditional standards and without metal components. It was test sailed on Suva Harbour, was paraded on Fiji Broadcasting Corporation’s float at Fiji’s 2015 Hibiscus Festival and featured in HM The Queen’s four-day 90th birthday pageant at Windsor Castle in 2016. After being shown in the *Fiji* exhibition at UEA, it was then displayed at the Fiji Prime Minister’s request as an icon of carbon-free transport at the COP23 Climate Change meeting in Bonn in November 2017. The Prime Minister, as Chair of COP23, repeatedly stressed that, with respect to climate change,

“We are all in the same canoe” and publicly credited Hooper when he opened the Fiji Pavilion in Bonn (5.5). The canoe caught the attention of the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich who have installed it as a major feature of their new *Pacific Encounters* gallery (opened 2018). Hearing of this canoe initiative, the Director of Berlin’s Ethnologisches Museum contacted Hooper to arrange a commission for a larger 11m canoe, delivered in 2019, as a special feature for their new museum in the Humboldt Forum in Berlin. The museum is developing a VR navigation programme for use by children, who will be allowed on deck. A third (8m) canoe was commissioned by LACMA for display at the *Fiji* exhibition in LA. [REDACTED], Head of Mechanical Engineering at Fiji National University and canoe project manager in Fiji, wrote to Hooper:

“I can honestly say that your exhibition projects, that have enabled us to build three beautiful drua, have reinvigorated our canoe-building heritage and allowed us to hand on the skills that were dying out... I now have the confidence to think we can do an even bigger project together and build a drua like the great ones of the past... This would be a fantastic floating classroom to teach children about their proud voyaging heritage” (5.4).

In summary, Fiji-focused research has increased recognition of the value of Fiji’s artistic heritage at all levels in Fiji, the USA and the UK, with concomitant financial support for exhibitions, activities, skills revival and, in the near future, substantial funding for the total redevelopment of Fiji’s national museum. The three canoe commissions brought approximately GBP90,000 directly into the Fiji economy, besides approx. GBP31,000 paid by sponsors to transport the canoes to the UK, Germany and the USA. Sponsorship for the *Fiji* exhibitions at UEA and LA amounted to over GBP800,000 (from Fiji Water, Sainsbury Centre, LACMA, Tourism Fiji, Fiji Airways, Mundy Cruising). The additional economic impact of these exhibitions and other project-linked activities is extensive. In recognition of his contribution, Hooper was invited as guest of honour at the 2016 UK Fiji Day celebrations in Ipswich (400 guests) and in 2017 was awarded The Order of Fiji by the President of Fiji for services to culture and education, an honour usually only bestowed on Fiji citizens (5.1). For heritage professionals in Fiji the impact has been profound. [REDACTED], Research Officer at the iTaukei Trust Fund Board, wrote in August 2018:

“I have never really stopped talking about and sharing my experience of that UK tour... one couldn’t help but be inspired... We have never stopped sharing and implementing what we’ve learned as individuals and as institutions” (5.8).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 Letter from the Fiji UK High Commissioner
- 5.2 Emails from Fijian resident of the UK, commenting on the *Fiji* exhibition and book
- 5.3 Letter from the Chair of Fiji Museum Board
- 5.4 Letter from Fiji National University on revival of traditional canoe-building
- 5.5 Speeches by Prime Minister of Fiji when President of COP23, at the opening of COP23 (digital evidence held on file at UEA)
- 5.6 Official statement/review of Fiji exhibition at UEA: press, sales and visitor details, plus features in official AHRC research publications
- 5.7 Letter from Deputy Director of Los Angeles County Museum of Art
- 5.8 Letter from Research Officer at the iTaukei Trust Fund Board (Fiji)
- 5.9 Interview with the UK High Commissioner to Fiji
<https://www.facebook.com/maitvfiji/videos/286096495848962/> (18 June 2020) (held at UEA)
- 5.10 Letters proposing MOUs to Fiji Museum from the Directors of the British Museum, National Museums Scotland, and Oxford and Cambridge University Museums