After the curtain fell abruptly in December 2013, the Byre Theatre reopened its doors to the public in late 2014 under a management agreement between the University of St Andrews, Fife Council and Creative Scotland. Amid doubts that the university could run a community theatre, an enthusiastic team had the vision to restore it to a reinvigorated cultural hub for north-east Fife.

This renewed effort to establish a reputation in the arts meant the need for the first large-scale production to be ground-breaking, innovative and wide-reaching was paramount. The project undertaken by the newly re-opened Byre Theatre was the multi-media, interdisciplinary spectacle ‘Moana: The Rising of the Seas’, an intense blend of contemporary choreography, traditional dance, poetry, music and song. It was the creation of the Pacific's foremost directors and performers - Oceania Dance Theatre and Pasifika Voices - based at the University of the South Pacific's Oceania Centre for the Arts, Culture and Pacific Studies. An EU-funded research collaboration on the social dimensions of climate change enabled the University of St Andrews' Centre for Pacific Studies and USP's Oceania Centre to host a 30-strong Moana troupe for a suite of performances, educational and dance workshops, and to accomplish three interconnected innovations:

1. launch a new University-led collaboration to re-open The Byre Theatre and embed it in the local community as a venue of high-quality artistic performances, research collaboration and public engagement;

2. borrow and learn from USP's Oceania Centre’s highly successful model for combining research, visual and performing arts and community development; and

3. demonstrate research insights through the Moana show and accompanying pop-up Oceania exhibition to convey Pacific cosmology across all three floors of the Byre, a series of outreach events, school and dance workshops and a research symposium.

In combination, these innovations produced an intense holistic experience: the Byre was transformed into a Pacific island home for the performers - and by their own testament, this place and wrapping in Pacific cosmology enabled and elicited their most potent performances of their European tour, and powerfully demonstrated that to which the collaborative research and Moana point: the inseparability of people and land and the impossibility of climate migration from the places of which Pacific peoples are also made. These Pacific cosmological connections provided the experimental rationale for demonstrating connections between arts and research, between international collaborators, between 'Town and Gown', and between European and Pacific communities whose life choices are intimately connected.

The Byre event was unique on the tour in bringing together the Fijian and local performers, Pacific- and locally-based visual artists working in different media, researchers and policy-makers to share ideas in artistic practice and university-based research, creating a cohesive, all-encompassing encounter with the Pacific. Collaboration and exchange were key and Moana has far-reaching consequences beyond just the project organisers. Artistic practice was shared, a video of the event was produced and disseminated online. Engagement with Pacific-based social media users was strong, and international, cooperative links were forged that will impact on generations to come.
Research Symposium 'Restoring the Human to Climate Change in the Pacific'

Following a welcoming performance by the Moana troupe, researchers from St Andrews presented a report written for the EU that conveys Pacific and social scientific perspectives on climate change, and which critically engages current EU policy in the region. Researchers from USP and the wider EU-funded consortium presented associated research to an audience including the Samoan Ambassador to the EU, and an official from H2020 at the European Commission, and whose responses illustrate key impacts. In a context leading up to the COP21 climate conference, the Ambassador spoke of the publicity Moana was receiving back in the Pacific, of the critical importance of the awareness and value of Pacific cultures and the urgency of climate change issues, and of the coming Moana performance in the European Parliament, and of how this all underscored, highlighted and supported the invitation (initiated and facilitated by St Andrews) to the Samoan Head of State to give a keynote speech in Brussels in the following weeks.

For his part, the EC official responded that he had been blown away by the Moana performances, Oceania exhibition, outreach events and the research findings, and announced that what he had seen in St Andrews provided the EC with a compelling rationale for a further H2020 research call on the Pacific (subsequently published later in 2015).

The Ambassador also spoke as an ex-Dean at USP, and of the importance that such international recognition would have personally for the performers and institutionally for the Oceania Centre and Pacific arts more widely, and confidently predicted that the future impacts of Moana would become evident as the performers were empowered into leadership roles in the arts and beyond.

Following this keynote speech in Brussels, the Ambassador reiterated the importance of Moana in fostering awareness and support for the Pacific and climate change, noting that it strengthened the Pacific's voice at a critically import time in the negotiations leading up to COP21. Indeed, the EU supported the Coalition of High Ambition which was initiated by Pacific leaders. We know that a film version of Moana was shown at the COP21 'Oceans Day' in the presence of Pacific leaders, and understand that it was heartily welcomed.

Dr Tony Crook said: "Pacific peoples are the least responsible but are the first affected by global warming and sea-level rise. The consequences of climate change are a daily reality for Pacific peoples. When you're on a tiny, flat, half-submerged, atoll with the Pacific Ocean expanding just below your feet, it really brings home what our own carbon dependency and the consequences dramatised by MOANA are all about.

We know what to do about climate change - just not how to do it. Too often, climate change is treated as a matter of belief in science, an effect upon nature that requires a technical intervention. But for social scientists, climate change is a powerful social relationship that intimately connects the life choices of people whose lives are thought of as distant to each other - but as MOANA shows, Europeans have a close personal social connection with Pacific Islanders. Our respective life choices are inter-connected - and MOANA's making climate change personal in this way may provoke ideas on how this social relation can be more equitable. Research at the Centre for Pacific Studies aims at restoring the human to climate change in the Pacific.

MOANA is the Pacific Ocean - and also Pacific peoples. What we see powerfully dramatised in this theatre performance is the rising of MOANA - the cultures that we stand to lose rising up to meet the challenge of the rising ocean. We see Pacific peoples at their most vulnerable - and at their most resistant. And just as Pacific peoples *are* the ocean, they *are* the land too - they can't be separated, but that's what global warming threatens to do."
Performing moana in Saint Andrews was one of our best performances ever. To me personally, seeing all the support that St Andrews gave made me emotional because I realize that we small island nations also matter to big places like St Andrews who were willing to help us voice out our cries to the rest of the world on how climate change is affecting our small island countries in the Pacific. -Gali Vulaciri
Impact of Moana’s St Andrews collaboration on Pacific islanders and dissemination of Pacific cultural works

Moana can be seen as part of a wider contemporary Pacific movement to show the world a better way of living with the Earth, by showing us how to navigate towards the 'island of hope'. As much as traditional Pacific voyaging canoes are currently criss-crossing the oceans, blocking coal ports and campaigning for climate justice, the counterpart social movement seeks practical ways of conveying the connections, values and relations in Pacific cosmologies that we can learn from. Knowing that we would be hosting the Moana visitors, St Andrews researchers were able to draw upon their own research to transform The Byre Theatre into a Pacific island and curated a pop-up Oceania exhibition over three floors - undersea, land and sky - to convey different cosmological realms, and illustrate Pacific perspectives from across Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia.

The Byre Theatre became home for a week, with the Moana troupe rehearsing, performing, relaxing and engaging with visitors and the exhibition - and enthusiastically sharing it all back home through social media. The directors spoke of how relaxed and grounded the performers were, and of how they were raising their performances in response to the island setting created for them, and in reciprocity for the evident care, knowledge and interest that had been shown them through by making the Byre into a Pacific island. The performers spoke about, and showed in many different ways, the impact of recognition of Pacific culture by an international audience - particularly so given Britain's colonial history in Fiji, Samoa and wider Pacific - and of the profound importance of knowing that other people cared about their Pacific islands and culture.

The directors also spoke of the importance of the experience for the performers, and what it will mean to them, their families, islands and countries - but also about the opportunities for projects and collaborations will open up as a consequence. Indeed, they said that the St Andrews experience would even reorientate everyone's sense of their own and the Pacific's place in the world.

'You made us an island here. Each night the Byre Theatre was just like any place in the Pacific, with people meeting, talking, singing and drinking together. The bar was filled with Fijians and Samoans, some from our USP group, but so many people who we didn't know: some who'd come from nearby Leuchars, from Edinburgh, from Stoke and from London. Whilst some of these people had family and kinship connections, many of them learned about Moana from the papers, radio and TV - and then just came! There was even a Fijian who'd flown over from Germany and was buying everyone drinks each night - he was just so proud of these young people, and told me he now felt so much more at home in Europe. I met several ex-pats who'd lived in Fiji, and one who I had to turn my back on and tell them to get out - she'd stayed on an island close to my own, and that's how we jokingly greet each other! For the Moana group to see that the Pacific was also here, was also present, was also Europe - that just blew their minds and they couldn't stop talking about it. This was the real art and spirit of Moana - it made us all so happy, and created an enduring attachment to St Andrews.' Dr Joeli Veitayaki, Marine Science, USP.

Moana has further cemented long-standing relations between St Andrews and the resident Pacific community in Edinburgh, and also created new relations with several Fijian families newly posted to our neighbouring Leuchars military base.

CPS researcher Dr Jara Hulkenberg conducted her doctoral fieldwork in the Fijian community at the British Army's Redford Barracks in Edinburgh. Having subsequently married into this community, Jara now teaches Pacific Studies in the Oceania Centre at USP in Suva.

120 Pacific islanders from across the UK travelled to Redford to host the Moana crew following their performances at The Byre Theatre and National Museum of Scotland. The resident Pacific community had gone to great lengths in spontaneously preparing a massive family gathering, a kava ceremony and huge feast on traditional mats. The Moana crew improvised drumming instruments, sang and danced - during which their hosts displayed their pride by sticking money to the crew's clothes. Emotions ran very high through laughter and tears, through shared memories of people and places. Many people left that evening feeling a small miracle had happened.
"The inclusion and exhibition of OCACPS Visual Arts at The Byre was a European first for our work, brought valuable attention to our work internationally and across the Pacific region, and was instrumental in enabling USP and the Oceania Centre to provide follow-on funding for our community art outreach workshops on Beqa island in Fiji."

Johanna Beasley
Visual Arts Coordinator
Oceania Centre for Arts, Culture and Pacific Studies

"Thank you for giving us the opportunity to exhibit and be a part of MOANA. You have given us a lot of good publicity on the international stage as well as here at home. This would not have happened without you."

Ben Fong
Gallery of Oceanian Art
Oceania Centre for Arts, Culture & Pacific Studies

The experience at St. Andrews was wonderful, it really inspired me by providing a very rich and strong historical aspect to my creativity on the Moana Rising of the Sea production.
- Igelese Orekene Eke

St Andrews...was by far the best place for me. It’s very small, compact and full of history. It felt like every street corner and cobblestone has a story to tell and makes me want to go back and re-live those moments in history...In terms of Moana, St Andrews lies along this beautiful stretch of ocean that makes it vulnerable to the rising of the sea. It is no different than our own Pacific Islands. St Andrews is just as vulnerable as we are. Being there alone makes me want to learn more of what the place was, is and is about to become. It’s so full of history and tradition that one can create endless pieces of work just by being there. I love St Andrews - Tulevu Tora
The impact was vast, as measured by attendance and engagement of audiences as well as in the way the project forged new connections between academics, artists, and communities. The University of St Andrews' Centre for Pacific Studies, MUSA, and the Byre Theatre launched a new initiative to bring this inspirational production to Europe.

The project was funded by a grant from the University of St Andrews' Centre for Pacific Studies, MUSA, and the Byre Theatre. The grant was awarded to support the production of the play and to bring it to Europe. The project was a collaborative effort between the University of St Andrews, MUSA, and the Byre Theatre, and it was designed to promote cultural exchange and to foster new connections between artists and communities.

The project was a success, and it received widespread critical acclaim. The play was performed to sell-out audiences, and it was praised for its innovative approach to storytelling and its ability to engage with contemporary issues. The project was a testament to the power of arts and culture to bring people together and to promote understanding and cooperation.

The project was highly regarded, and it was seen as a model for future cultural exchange projects. The University of St Andrews, MUSA, and the Byre Theatre were recognized for their contributions to the project, and they were commended for their commitment to promoting cultural exchange and diversity.

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Stepping out with green play

A colourful troupe of 30 Fijian dancers descended on St Andrews University yesterday for the UK debut of a play about climate change.

The group—a ensemble of dancers and singers from the University of South Pacific—is in Fife for a three day run of Moana: The Rising of the Sea at the university’s Byre Theatre.

Moana is an ambitious play that hopes to raise more awareness of global warming through the medium of performing arts.

Picture: George McLuskie.