



ARTS & CULTURE

Britain's 'Shark House' Becomes Protected Landmark

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A famously strange statue in the city of Oxford, England recently received official protection as a historic landmark. But, Magnus Hanson-Heine, the son of the man who built the artwork, is not happy about the special recognition.

But first, about that statue: It is a 7.6 meter tall model of a shark. The strange part is in the sculpture's positioning up on the top of the Hanson-Heine house. It appears from the street as if the huge fish dove straight through the home's **roof**.

Magnus Hanson-Heine's father, Bill, put up the **sculpture** in 1986 as a protest against war and nuclear weapons. He worked on the art project with his friend, sculptor John Buckley.

Bill Heine was an American who studied law at the University of Oxford and made the town his home. He got the idea for the sculpture after he heard American warplanes fly over his house one night in April 1986. The next morning, he learned that the planes had been on their way to bomb Tripoli, Libya.

The men put the sculpture on display on August 9 to mark the 41st anniversary of the atomic bomb attack on Hiroshima, Japan.

The image of a shark crashing through the home captured the shock civilians must feel when bombs smash into their homes, Magnus Hanson-Heine said.

Bill Heine died in 2019.

Magnus Hanson-Heine calls the local government's declaration about the sculpture "**absurd.**" His father, he explained, never sought nor accepted permission to put up the shark. In fact, he strongly believed, his son said, that the government should not decide what art the public should see.

And, Hanson-Heine noted, the same local **council** that has declared the shark historic and protected, had spent years seeking its removal.

The shark's anti-war message is just as important today, Hanson-Heine said, as Russian bombs fall on Ukraine.

"That's obviously something that the people in Ukraine are experiencing right now in very real time," he said.

While that message is serious, the strange sculpture that rises over the otherwise normal street incites some fun and laughter as well.

Especially when someone asks about the model shark's unseen head. The story is that it crashed through to just above the **toilet**.

That, a laughing Magnus Hanson-Heine said, is a **myth**.

I'm Dan Friedell.

Dan Friedell adapted this story for VOA Learning English based on a report by the Associated Press.

How would you feel if you saw a shark sticking out of a home where you live? Let us know. Write to us in the Comments Section and visit our Facebook page.

Words in This Story

roof -*n.* the cover or top of a building or vehicle

sculpture - *n.* a piece of art that is made by molding or carving clay, stone, metal, etc.

city council - *n.* the group of people who make rules for a city

absurd - *adj.* extremely silly, foolish or ridiculous

toilet - *n.* a large bowl that is attached to a pipe that is used for getting rid of bodily waste and then flushed with water

myth - *n.* an idea or story that is believed by many people but is not true
