“Bowie’s teeth were like everything else about him: different”

An interview with German tooth artist Jessine Hein

David Bowie was undoubtedly a major figure in popular music in the 1970s and 1980s. He is also one of the many celebrities who have undergone cosmetic dental treatment and had his characteristically crooked teeth replaced with a set of crowns in the early 1990s. Inspired by Bowie’s unique original look, Jessine Hein, a German painter and sculptor, made a reproduction of the singer’s natural teeth. Dental Tribune had the opportunity to speak with Hein about her denture sculpture and her perception of beautiful teeth.

Jessine Hein: Bowie’s teeth were like everything else about him: different! Not the aesthetic norm, not perfect, but they were strikingly beautiful in the context of his whimsical and miraculous being. His smile revealed an imperfection that made him seem more real, more human, someone to identify with.

An imperfection worn confidentiality inspires sympathy. Bowie was a role model for many people and I think his teeth contributed to that. The vast variety of talents, iconic style and incomparable physique that make up Bowie, and the different universes he created around himself, have always impressed and inspired me. I have been incredibly fascinated with teeth for a long time and have paid close attention to the ivories of natural teeth.

I do understand how orthodontics can improve one’s self-confidence, as I went through years of tooth alignment myself in my teens. There are four teeth missing in my maxillae. Besides having had trouble chewing properly, I looked like a freakish vampire. It was not very helpful to have an odd-looking set of teeth in this awkward phase of adolescence. But then, I did not appreciate the beauty in the difference because I was too concerned with trying desperately to survive as a shy teenager at school.

Today, however, I celebrate teeth that are not the norm. I love the diversity and character they bring to the human head. I find it quite sad that these days almost every child undergoes some kind of dental treatment to align his or her differences solely for aesthetic reasons. Some of them might grow up wishing they still had their characteristic natural look.

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I have heard Bowie talk about his old teeth in a confident way. He stated they looked fine to him. So, no, I do not think he felt uncomfortable about them at the time, quite the opposite; he was famous for celebrating his striking body in all its otherworldliness.

What do you intend to do with the sculpture? Have you been approached by collectors and fans of the singer who would like to purchase it?

The sculpture is currently with me and will be until an opportunity for exhibiting comes up. I have various kinds of sculpture and painting projects in the making that will need some more time to develop. Once they are completed, I envision the David Bowie denture being presented in the context of the new pieces.

I have been contacted by several potential buyers, but the sculpture is not currently for sale, as I would like to have the option of putting it on display.

Thank you very much for this interview.