

Controversial 'Nazi monument' is removed after international media storm: "It was never our intention to hurt people"



The artwork *De Latvian Bijenkorf* will no longer be on display at its current location in Vloethemveld. — © mvm

ZEDELGEM -The controversial work of art *De Latvian Bijenkorf* is disappearing from the Zedelgem street scene. At least temporarily, because the municipality is looking for a permanent solution and location for the monument, which some say would be a tribute to the Latvian Nazi collaboration. "We don't want to act hastily," says Alderman for Heritage Jurgen Dehaemers.

Arne Franck

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In June, the Zedelgem municipal council came into the eye of the storm when the French magazine *Paris Match* noticed a tribute to the 12,000 Latvian Nazi collaborators who were imprisoned in the prisoner of war camp in Vloethemveld after the war in the monument *De Latvian Bijenkorf*. Opposition party Vooruit demanded the removal of "The shame of Zedelgem", but Heritage Alderman Jurgen Dehaemers (CD&V-Nieuw) stated that the work is not an ode to Nazism, but only to freedom.

Nevertheless, the municipality decided to provide the information board with a new, more nuanced text during the work. Later, the name of the square where the artwork is located, Brivibaplein, was again changed to the original name 'Perdenbijk'. According to critics, the name Briviba, the Latvian word for freedom, gave the impression that the monument is dedicated to the release of Latvian prisoners of war, who thus escaped their punishment. *(Read more below the photo)*



The original information board at De Latvian Bijenkorf. — © r

Last week, at the request of the municipality of Zedelgem, an international group of historians also gathered to discuss the issue. "The controversy of the past few months, the trajectory and the recommendations that are now on the table have further opened the eyes of the municipality to the complexity of this story," says Alderman Dehaemers. "But as also concluded by the experts, it was never our intention to pay tribute to the Nazi regime, excuse war crimes or purposely hurt people."

Nevertheless, the experts advise to remove the artwork. "We are initiating a period of reflection in which we will make further appeal to the international advisory committee and, together with all parties involved, will look for a supported and well-considered permanent solution and location for *De Latvian Bijenkorf*", concludes Dehaemers.

I'd rather be gone for good

MP Vicky Reynaert (Vooruit), who rang the bell at the time, is satisfied with the decision, but regrets that it is not clear what will happen to the monument. "For us, it can disappear forever," she says. "We must absolutely avoid it regaining its original meaning in another location. I hope that the understanding of the municipal authorities will continue to grow that the monument is experienced as very offensive by the relatives of the victims of the Nazi atrocities, the patriotic associations and the Jewish community."

It has not yet been decided when the monument will be removed.