

At Resobox, the Dream Snake paintings

by Andrew Benjamin, Chronicle Contributor

Vernon Bigman uses his art to tell a story. But instead of a tale grounded in reality, he chooses the abstract lens of a dream to tell the spectator something.

Now on display at Resobox, the Japanese art gallery in Long Island City, is Bigman's Dream Snake series of oil paintings, a collection spanning over 10 years. More than a dozen of the works are on display until Nov. 12 and are also for sale. A reception was held Friday for the Bronx-based artist.

Bigman credits his approach to his work to his teachers at the San Francisco Art Institute, who "not only taught me about art but life, and the idea of thinking about life."

His initial inspiration for the Dream Snake series came not from a dream, but from a magazine of "decorative items people might want to buy."

"I saw this little wooden object. It was sort of a zig-zaggy little thing," he recalled, describing it as a "little beaded shape of a snake." Bigman added that a Mexican shaman covered it in leather, beaded the whole thing and called it a dream snake.

This object stuck with Bigman and he created these works based around that dream snake.

"I thought about viewing life through dreams and trying to talk about life through dreams," he said.

He further explains in an artist's statement that, "In this body of paintings, everything is at play, everything is on the move. Each part has its own script or job to do. By doing, the tale of events unfolds and is discovered — but like a dream, even that tale may later change yet again, to tell another story.

"In many ways, change is our world. Everything will one day change to something new, simply because that is what it does.

"Using this dream view, I hope to tell us a new story all the time, singing to the viewer a new song of changing life and the environment, and maybe, the nature of being."

The pieces touch on themes ranging from death to coffee to the number 62, using colors to create dreamlike images that capture a viewer's attention.

Resobox is a gallery that devotes itself to Japanese culture, not only putting artworks on display but offering classes in everything from Japanese ink painting to dance and the use of Samurai swords.

Takashi Ikezawa, Resobox's event coordinator, sees a Japanese influence in Bigman's work. The artist himself is an American Indian of the DinÉ, or Navajo, tribe.

"His artwork is very strong, powerful," Ikezawa said. "He was definitely influenced in Japanese art from his wife."

Bigman's wife, Deborah Klens-Bigman, is a specialist on Japanese culture who teaches the Samurai class at Resobox.

She said the Eastern influence "is partly from me," adding, "It's also a sense of respecting and studying the past, using it as a form of expression."

As for Bigman's favorite piece, he doesn't give an answer. Instead, he points to the top of his head.

“It’s sort of like you take it and peel it out and put it here,” he said, gesturing toward the canvas. “But then there’s always another one there.”

The Dream Snake series

When: Mon.-Fri., 8 a.m.-5 p.m.; weekends by appointment; through Nov. 12.

Where: Resobox, 41-26 27 St., LIC

(718) 784-3680, resobox.com