



(left) SIMON OGDEN  
*It's my party and I'll cry if I want to* 2016  
 Acrylic & oil paints, pencil, wallpaper & paper collage, 22 ct gold leaf, sterling silver & copper leaf patinated, 4 panels, each 795 x 795 mm.

(below) SIMON OGDEN  
*Flag, bird, gold, smoke* 2016  
 Mixed media with gold leaf, 795 x 795 mm.

**Wellington**  
**Simon Ogden**  
*Improbable Landscapes*

Bowen Galleries  
 26 September–16 October  
 MALCOLM BURGESS

Simon Ogden's latest show, *Improbable Landscapes*, has about it the feel of entering a tomb that has been sealed for millennia, only to find that the artworks contained therein are more sketch-like and ephemeral than expected. The underlying forms are recognisably Ogden-esque, but a new style is apparent and whole new chapter of detail awaits deciphering.

There is another problem: it is also written in a secret language that does not exactly scream its messages out loud—which is, of course, half the fun for budding linguists and others up for a challenge. There may be some hope for amateur tomb robbers, to be found in the descriptive titles—perhaps they will provide some direction, like a Rosetta stone, and help translate what's going on in these perplexing mixed-media works.

*It's my party and I'll cry if I want to* (2016), for example, is a series of four works that feature shapes and images, we are told, drawn from Ogden's travels (he cites New

Mexico and California, London, the Netherlands and Italy), although some are also redeployed from past works. Together, they produce what he describes as a quiet, nostalgic quality. Indeed, one's journey through these four panels exposes the viewer to a range of religious iconography that could believably be drawn from both American and European cultures (Ogden's interests as a fine arts academic at Canterbury University include European, English and American modernism and surrealism). We see churches straddling the world, sceptres and bird-like beings, and a ghostly tree-like form that appears to be in the act of worship. The party at which he may or may not be crying? Perhaps it is a reference to Ogden's method of gathering found objects and forms, and the emotional content that arises from the resulting deeply personal landscape.

The remaining works in the show are standalone—although they could easily be considered part of a wider series, so constant is their style and vocabulary. *Flag, bird, gold, smoke* (2016), a mixed-media piece with gold leaf, stands out with its series of three vertical figures, totem-like in their arrangement of forms atop other forms. The 'flag' of the title is certainly no conventional flag, but a more universal narrative relating to the concept of a flag, and the 'bird' is the least interesting aspect of the form it perches atop. Here, Ogden's titles are coyly metonymical, withdrawing their suggestive potential, leaving the viewer afloat.

*Floating east but looking west* (2016), on the other hand, is a title that is a story in itself, and the slow, circular whirlpool dance of symbols within tallies with the sense of unconscious drift it creates. Forms seem appropriately unaware of their own clustering, of the hidden jet streams, tectonics and crowd behaviour they are beholden to in a world where there is no edge to fall off, but just another time zone to enter.

This show is a pleasingly light-hearted tangent compared to the usual heavily layered linoleum works for which Ogden is more well-known.

