

## Stitching science

**John Walter has hand-sewn a series of elaborately customised onesies to explain how viruses work**

By his own admission, the London-based artist John Walter tends to gravitate towards complex narratives. His latest obsession, and the subject for a multimedia exhibition at Home in Manchester, are CAPSIDs. These are the protein shells that enable the transmission of vicious viruses, including HIV.

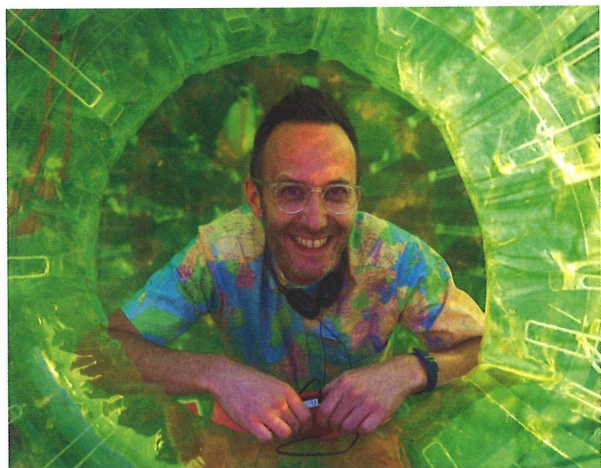
With funding from the Wellcome Trust, Walter has collaborated with the molecular virologist Professor Greg Towers at University College London, whose research has challenged exactly what CAPSIDs are for and how they work. When friends asked what he was working on, the artist found it hard to explain. 'I kept finding myself saying, "Imagine a virus walks into a bar",' he says.

The centrepiece of Walter's exhibition is a film called (naturally) *A Virus Walks Into a Bar*. It translates Towers's research into the context of an East End boozery, with a cast of characters dressed in customised onesies who represent various defensive proteins and cytoplasms. Walter is the (HIV) interloper who wants to cause a fight (or rather an infection). Since, like a real soap opera, this is based in human reality, Walter inevitably wins the day.

The film, while scientifically accurate, is a visual extravaganza. Walter creates all the onesies by hand, and decorates them in a variety of techniques including blanket stitch, appliqué and felting. His enthusiasm for textiles dates back to his early teens, and while studying fine art at the Ruskin, he made kidneys, livers and other anatomical parts in soft work. The CAPSID costume ENV, which is covered in hundreds of buttons, took Walter five months to complete. 'It clicks and clacks – my boyfriend almost left me because the noise was so annoying,' he says.

The rest of the exhibition occupies Home's main gallery, which is divided into six room sets. Walter has created CAPSID-covered wallpaper, as well as a series of 5 metre-wide paintings in his signature cross-hatch style. It's a maximalist immersive world where visual references range from the cartoon *Adventure Time* to Las Vegas casino interiors. 'The carpets are off the hook, they're not even 1970s, they're contemporary psychedelic,' says Walters.

Aside from a better understanding of the workings of CAPSIDs and antiretroviral drugs, Walter intends the show to be an assault on the senses. Science has never looked so good. *CAPSID is at HOME, Manchester M15 4FN, 10 November 2018 – 6 January 2019. [homemcr.org](http://homemcr.org)*



WALTER: PHOTO OLLIE HARROP

**Left: John Walter, and right: a selection of costumes made for the film *A Virus Walks into a Bar* for his show *CAPSID***

