

# Jacob van der Beugel

NewArtCentre.

# Jacob van der Beugel

*Wherever the two shall meet*

at Roche Court Sculpture Park

23 September - 26 November 2023

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## Foreword

There is no escaping the impact of genetic technologies on our cultures and society. Over the past several decades it has become possible both to read and to alter the sequences of the four molecular building blocks (called bases) that, permuted endlessly in our DNA, constitute our unique genomes. Reading that sequence – which commercial companies now offer to do by mail order – can seem like high-tech palmistry, analysing our genealogy and our personality and forecasting our fate from the health - and disease-related gene variants we carry. Meanwhile, genome editing techniques increasingly offer the prospect of changing that forecast, for example to “correct” gene mutations that induce diseases such as sickle-cell anaemia and Huntington’s disease.

The prospects can seem both exhilarating and scary. But they are also hard to grasp: how can the mere shuffling of DNA bases at the molecular scale have such an influence on who and how we are? One danger is that these scientific advances unfold against an overly simplistic view of what genes are and what they do. That is one reason why Jacob van der Beugel’s exploration of genetic information and its implications for human identity are not just exciting and visually captivating but also important. They capture the tension that exists at the heart of genetics between the seemingly hard and discrete, digital nature of a genomic sequence and the fuzzy, contingent, analogue character of its influence on our being.

As an artist in residence at the Wellcome Sanger Institute in Cambridge in 2015, van der Beugel witnessed world-leading research on genomics. His assemblies of ceramic tile-like blocks embody real genomic sequences while dispelling the notion that there need be anything deterministic about the information they encode. These representations offer a nuanced contrast to the “book of life” commissioned and housed by the Wellcome Collection in London: 109 volumes of the three billion or so “DNA letters” sequenced by the Human Genome Project, printed as uncompromising black characters on white paper.

Van der Beugel’s blocks, on the other hand, appear in graduated shades of both foreground and background, suggesting a context-dependent meaning. And on close inspection, the blocks have a surface that is only half smooth – the other half is rough where the clay was ripped apart. The duality reflects the way that each base is paired with another in the DNA double helix, but also the fact that its meaning often holds some unpredictability and ambiguity in the context of a living organism.

What is more, manifesting this information not as bits on a hard drive or letters on paper but in the malleable, plastic medium of clay reminds us that we too are in the end material entities: our cells, our flesh, are also mutable and plastic. In Egyptian and Chinese myth we too were literally fashioned from clay.

And so we are reminded in these works that a narrative based on information will never be enough to capture the quiddity of our existence. We have to wrestle with this puzzle: our genome sequences have real implications for our lives, but do not define them, or indeed even explain them. Science struggles to manage and convey such ambiguities, but they are the wellspring of art.

## Philip Ball

*Science writer, commentator and broadcaster.*

*He was awarded the 2022 Royal Society’s Wilkins-Medawar-Bernal Medal for contributions to the history, philosophy or social function of science.*



**A difficult pill to swallow: blue**

2023, Ceramics, Plymouth stone, concrete and armoured cables  
22 x 60 cm



**A difficult pill to swallow: red**

2023, Ceramics, serpentine stone, concrete  
22 x 60 cm



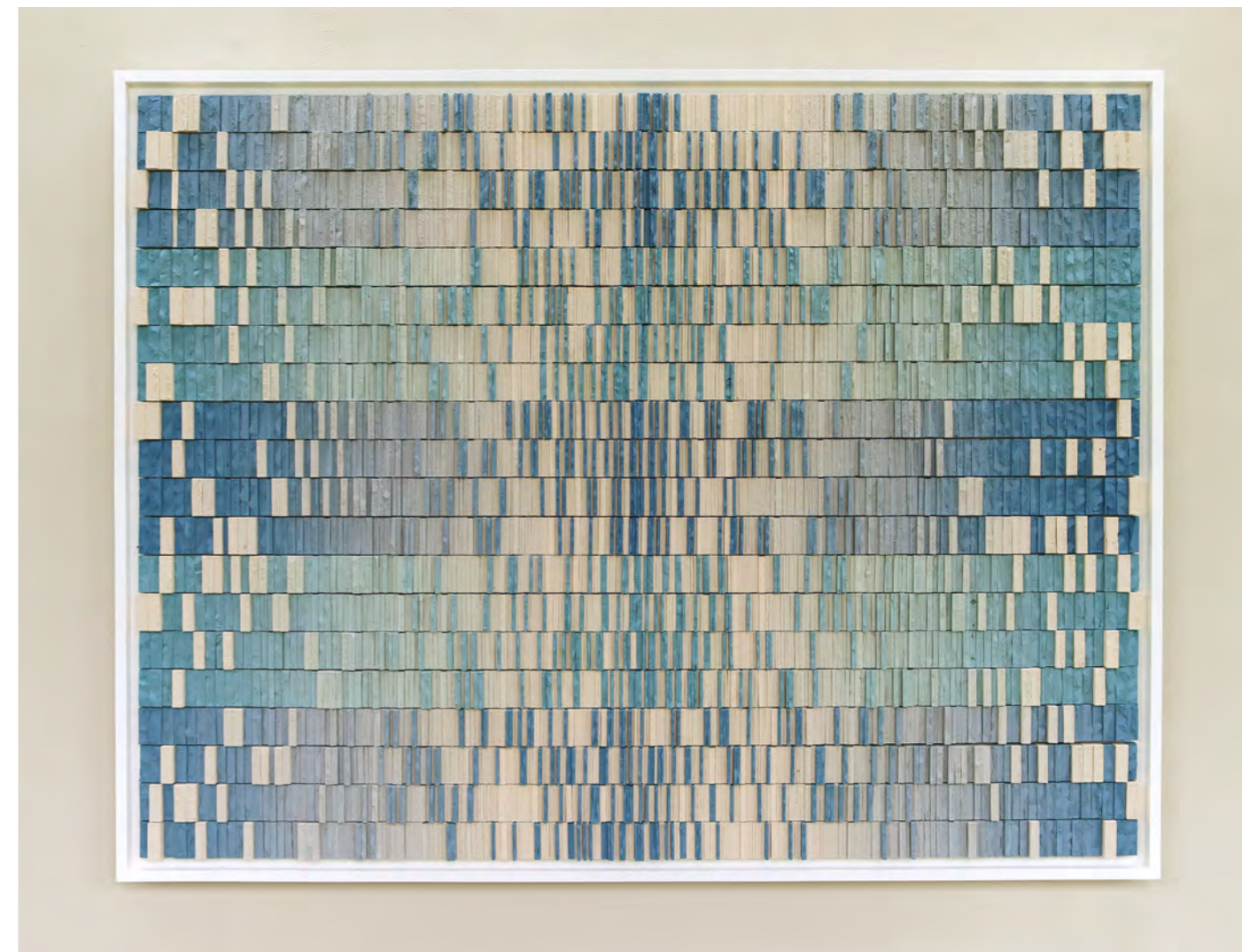
**A difficult pill to swallow: green**

2023, Ceramics, recycled aggregates, self-healing concrete  
22 x 60 cm



**Wherever the two shall meet**

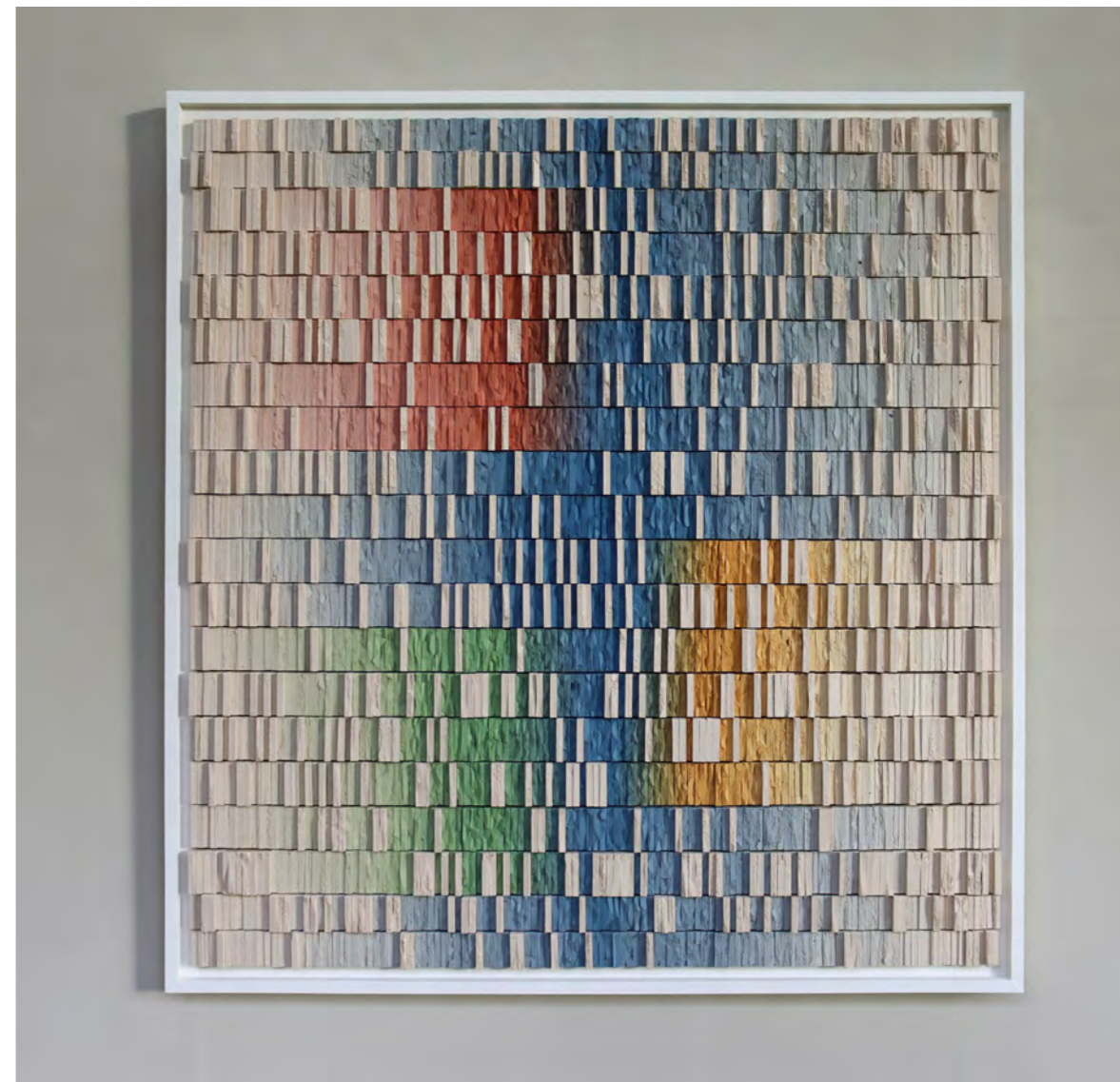
2023, Ceramics, wooden frame  
170 x 130 x 5 cm





**Cut and Paste 1**

2023, Ceramics, wooden frame  
120 x 130 x 5 cm



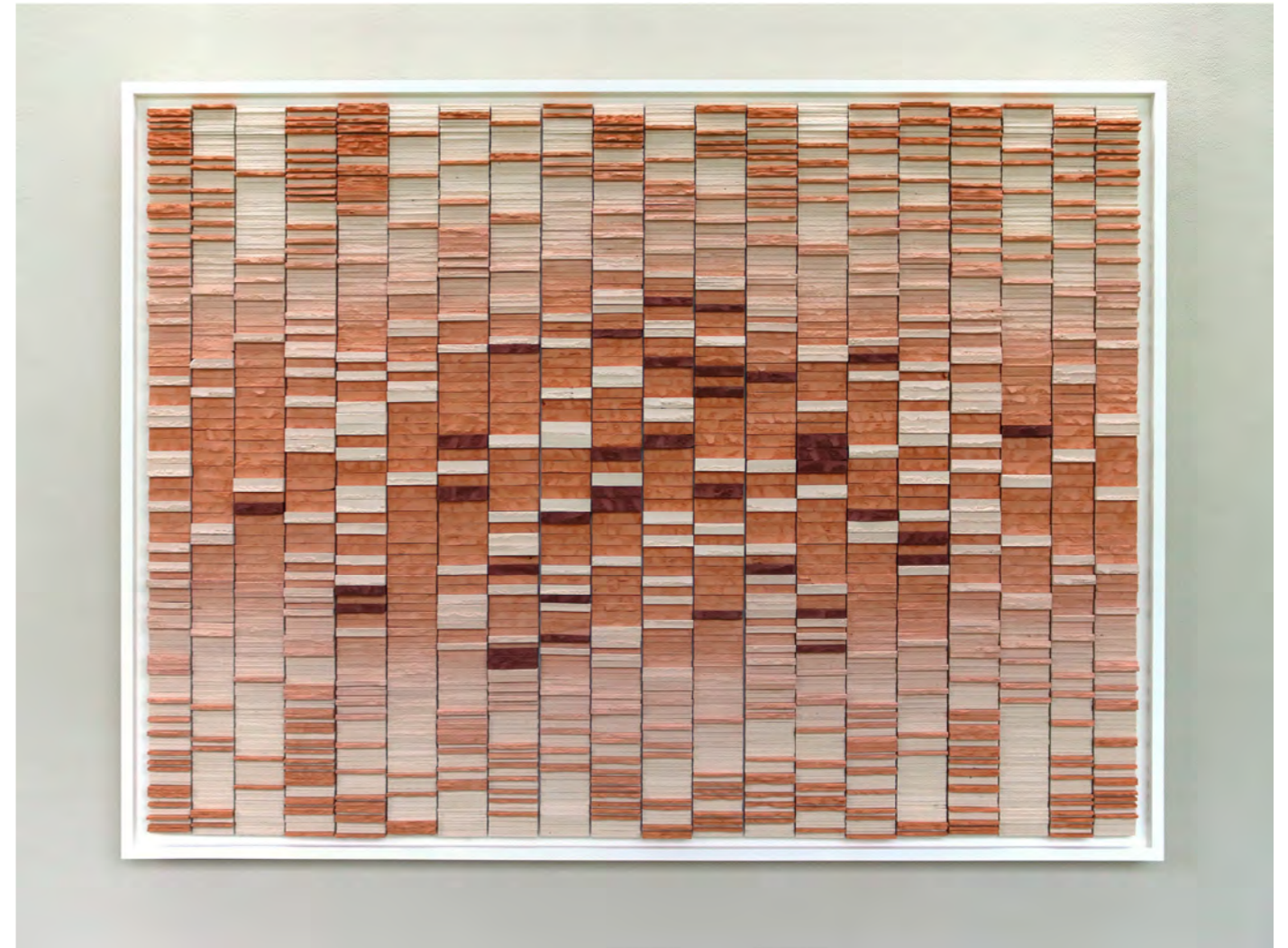
**Cut and Paste 2**

2023, Ceramics, wooden frame  
120 x 130 x 5 cm



**Event Horizon**

2023, Ceramics, wooden frame  
160 x 120 x 5 cm



**Order M1**

2020, Ceramic, concrete,  
steel, recycled aggregate  
100 x 25 cm



**Order M2**

2020, Ceramic, concrete,  
steel, recycled aggregate  
100 x 25 cm





**Order M3**

2020, Ceramic, concrete,  
stainless steel, recycled aggregate,  
self-healing concrete  
100 x 25 cm



**Order M4**

2020, Ceramic, concrete,  
stainless steel, recycled aggregate,  
self-healing concrete,  
perspex, microchips  
100 x 25 cm



**Jacob van der Beugel** - Born in London, UK, 1978. Lives and works in Devon, UK.

## Education

- 2003 - 2004** Assistant to Edmund de Waal
- 2001 - 2002** Apprentice of Rupert Spira
- 1997 - 2001** BA History of Art, York University, York, UK, Student of Michael White

## Commissions

- 2021** *Concrete Cancer*, The Ellison Institute for Transformative Medicine, Los Angeles
- 2019** *The DNA Room*, Huis ten Bosch, The Hague, The Netherlands  
*Variations in DDC*, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra Building, The Netherlands
- 2019** *Matter in Grey*, architectural commission for Cambridge University, Chemistry of Health Department, Cambridge, UK
- 2016 - 2017** *Alive*, York Art Gallery, resulting from a residency at C2D2, York University epidemiology department, York, UK
- 2011 - 2014** *The North Sketch Sequence*, permanent installation, Chatsworth House, UK
- 2013** *Good Year Bad Year*, private commission, Nice, France

## Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2023** *Wherever the two shall meet*, New Art Centre, Roche Court, UK
- 2020** *A Mutating Story*, Beelden aan Zee, The Netherlands
- 2008** Solo Focus Show, CAA, London, UK

## Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2020** *TEFAF Maastricht*, Tomasso Brother Fine Art, Maastricht, The Netherlands
- 2017** *Memento Mori*, Tomasso Brothers Fine Art, London, UK  
Art Brussels, New Art Centre, Brussels, Belgium
- 2015** *COLLECT*, Joanna Bird Contemporary, London, UK  
*Collections*, Saatchi Gallery, London, UK
- 2010** *SOFA New York*, Joanna Bird New York, New York, USA  
*COLLECT, CAA*, Saatchi Gallery, London, UK
- 2009** *Awards Exhibition*, British Ceramics Biennale, Stoke-On-Trent, UK  
*COLLECT, CAA*, Saatchi Gallery, London, UK  
*Browse & Darby*, Joanna Bird, London, UK
- 2008** *COLLECT*, Joanna Bird, V & A Museum, London, UK
- 2007** *SOFA Chicago*, Joanna Bird, Chicago, Illinois, USA  
Blackwell Arts & Crafts House with Edmund de Waal, Cumbria, UK

## Awards

- 2023** Fellow of Royal Society of Sculptors, UK
- 2022** Merit Winner CODAworx Award, US
- 2015** Member of Royal British Society of Sculptors
- 2014** Winner of CODAworx Award, USA
- 2009** Shortlisted for British Ceramics Biennale
- 2007** Arts Council, Development Award, UK

- 2006** Arts Council, Research and Professional Development Award. UK  
Grand Designs, Best in Show Award, UK
- 2005** Crafts Council Development Award, UK
- 2004** Winner of British Crafts in Japan Award, Chelsea Craft Fair, London, UK  
Winner of Design for Scandinavia Award, Chelsea Craft Fair, London, UK  
Winner of ELLE Decoration Future Classic Award

## Collections

- Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, The Netherlands, NL
- V & A Museum, London, UK
- New Art Centre, Roche Court, UK
- Devonshire Collection, Derbyshire, UK
- University of York, UK
- University of Cambridge, UK
- Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra building, NL

## Selected Publications, Catalogues and Lectures

- 2023** Visiting lecturer, Plymouth College of Art, UK
- 2022** Speaker at CODASummit, Denver, US  
Member of Hepworth Research Network

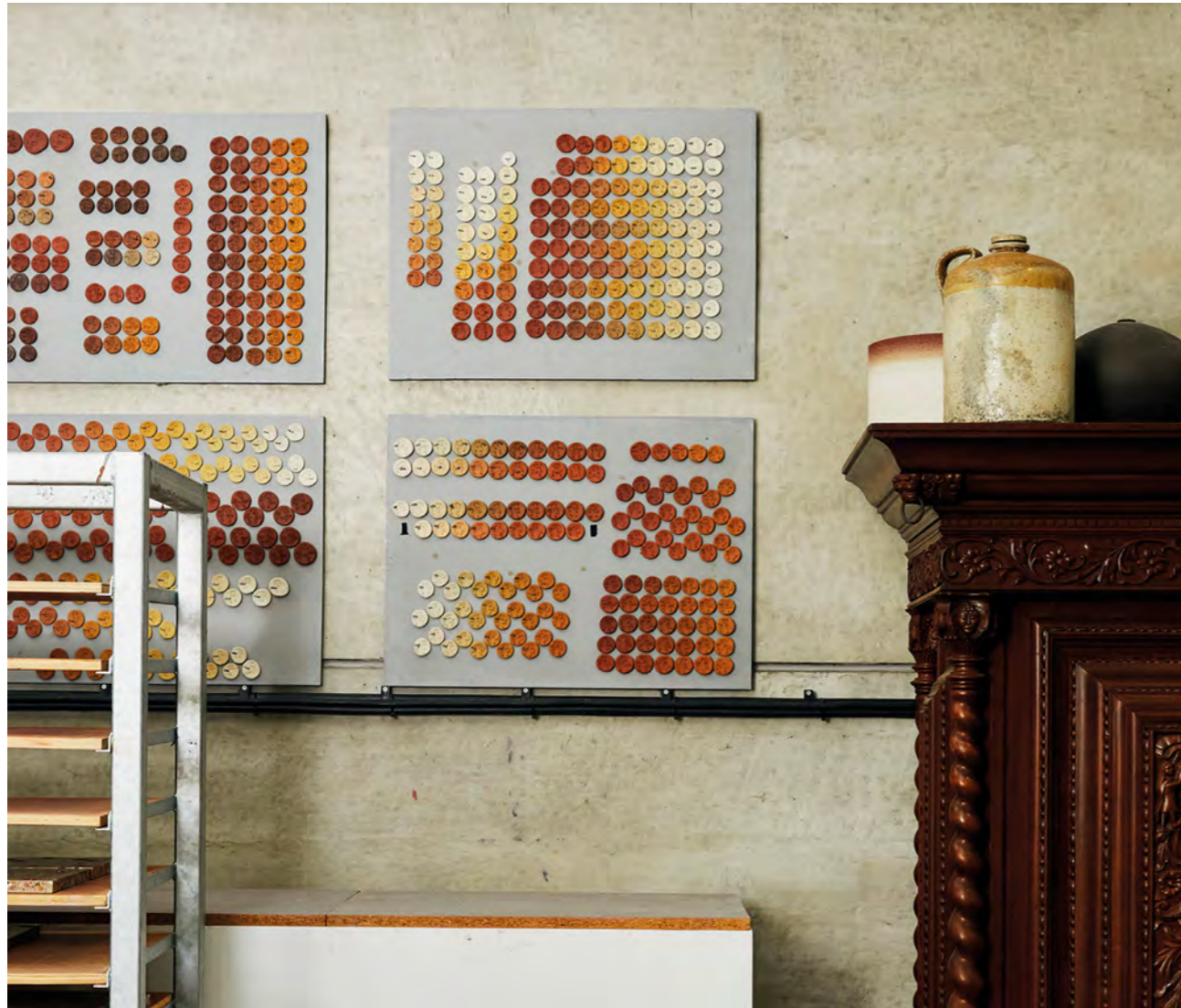
- 2021** *The Mutating Story*. The Hague: Sculptuur Instituut
- 2019** *The Groene Salon*. The Hague: Huis ten Bosch
- 2015** *Theo Scholten Lecture 2015*, Sculptuur Instituut, The Hague: The Netherlands
- 2014** *The North Sketch Sequence*, London: Joanna Bird

## Films

- 2020** *Hook Me Up to the Yellow*, Backwardsroll Productions, London, UK
- 2018** *Treasures of Chatsworth*. Episode 2, Sotheby's
- 2014** *The North Sketch Sequence*, Backwardsroll Productions, London, UK
- 2009** *The Barley House Installation*, Backwardsroll Productions, London, UK

## Artist Residencies

- 2023/24** EGENIS University of Exeter, UK
- 2019** The Wallace Collection, London, UK
- 2016** Epidemiology Department, York University, York, UK
- 2015** The Wellcome Sanger Institute, Hinxton, Cambridge, UK



Jacob van der Beugel's studio, 2023

*Scientists are making such breathtaking progress in transforming our current and future lives, that it becomes crucial for artists, in their strange and idiosyncratic ways, to add nuance and colour that further enriches our understanding.*

*I hope this exhibition gives voice and physical form to the complexities of our identity.*

Jacob van der Beugel

September 2023



Mutation series 2020, at Roche Court



Published on the occasion of the exhibition

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Artworks © Jacob van der Beugel

Photography © Jacob van der Beugel / Gerrit Schreurs / Emli Bendixen / Joe Dibden

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