



LOVE IS AN ACT

Natasha Caruana



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## LOVE IS AN ACT

at the Open Data Institute

17 July – 16 December, 2015

### Data as Culture 3: Data Anthropologies

places people at the centre of emerging data landscapes.

The Open Data Institute offers itself as the focal point of this exploration by hosting a series of Artists in Residence. During her time in residence at the ODI – from July to December, 2015 – photographic artist Natasha Caruana will exhibit recent works and develop a concept for a new piece, responding to or working with open data.

**Data as Culture 3: Data Anthropologies** is curated by Hannah Redler, ODI Associate Curator in Residence, with Julie Freeman, ODI Art Associate and Gavin Starks, ODI CEO. It includes artists' residencies, new commissions, events and partnerships.

Artists Thomson & Craighead were ODI Artists in Residence from February – June, 2015.

[theodi.org/culture](http://theodi.org/culture)

### About the artist



Natasha Caruana uses her own experience to explore the universal themes of love, fantasy and betrayal. While her primary medium is photography, she also employs performance, texts, sound, drawings, online materials, objects and film in her work. She also draws on data from diverse disciplines including science, psychology and anthropology.

Taking an ethnographic approach – the systematic study of people and cultures – Natasha gathers data from her subjects by placing herself into their circumstances and building direct relationships with them. In **'Fairytale for Sale'** she poses as a bride to be, for **'Married Man'** she creates a persona of a woman seeking an affair. **'Love Bomb'** explores love and self-destruction in a culture driven to achieve perfect romantic love. In **'At First Sight'** Natasha includes herself and her new husband amongst a study group of people who have fallen in love at first sight.

Natasha does not judge her subjects and her works equally invite us, their viewers, to suspend our own moralising in encountering them. Her unusual methods have attracted praise for being at the forefront of a new wave of documentary photographers, and have raised eyebrows given the fine ethical line she sometimes treads.

(Cover) *Fairytale for Sale*. Courtesy the artist



## FAIRYTALE FOR SALE

2011 – 2013

### Giclée print photographs with vinyl text piece

UK wedding customs and the fantasy, performance and trophies of the 'big day' are explored in a series of iconic wedding photographs. In each, new couples or brides display traditional garb and time-worn wedding poses. But the brides have obscured their own faces in these photographs: heads are chopped off, and faces are covered in black pen, digital cut-outs or smiley faces. Posing as a bride-to-be, Natasha contacted brides to discover their motivations for resale. These are reflected in a 'text cloud' alongside the images. The work raises questions about transactional elements of the marriage contract and the props of the big day. It also marks a point in time when sharing personal data online was less comfortable.

(Opposite, above) *Fairytale for Sale*. Courtesy the artist



## MARRIED MAN

2008 – 2009

### C-type photographs and vinyl text piece

A series of enlarged snapshot photographs show the remnants of dates between unseen people. Glimpses of men's hands, arms or truncated torsos appear but their identity is concealed. An accompanying soundtrack reveals the men were with a young woman – Natasha Caruana – who is not seen in any picture, but had secretly recorded each date.

Adopting a fake identity, Natasha went on 80 dates with married men she met through a website for people wanting extramarital affairs, hoping to uncover the men's motivations. She wore the same set of clothes to every date and was careful to limit each man to one meeting. She ended each date with the question: what are your intentions towards me?







## THE CLANDESTINE PURSE

2008 – 2009

### C-type photograph

The red purse travelled with Natasha Caruana on each of the 80 dates she arranged for her series 'Married Man'. In it, she hid a sound recorder to capture her conversations. The image also references the celebrated middle English poet Chaucer's suggestion of the woman's vagina as a 'purse'. It can be seen as a monument to the stories told by the married men and to the variety of exchanges made in the process of the different stages of courtship.

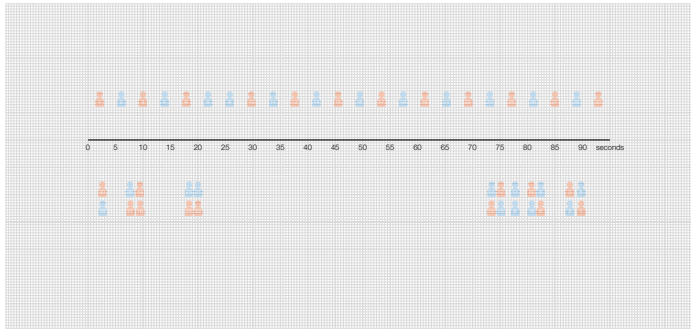
*The Clandestine Purse;*

(Opposite) *At First Sight 'The Thunderbolt'*. Courtesy the artist





EXPERIMENT #2



## AT FIRST SIGHT

2014 – 2015

**Lambda photographs, tracing paper graphs, vinyl drawing and concrete**

In 2014 Natasha Caruana fell in love at first sight. Using photography, scientific experiments and educational diagrams, she has created a new work that builds a conversation between the science of 'coup de foudre' (love at first sight) and people's own experiences. The project draws from popular myths and research by neuroscientists, biologists and anthropologists. It brings together her multiple strands of research and data through photographic portraits of individuals or couples who have fallen 'at first sight'; scientific diagrams of the heart and circulation systems; and photographs of locations used for scientific love experiments or re-enactments of real experiments originally set up and described by psychologists.

### Portraits

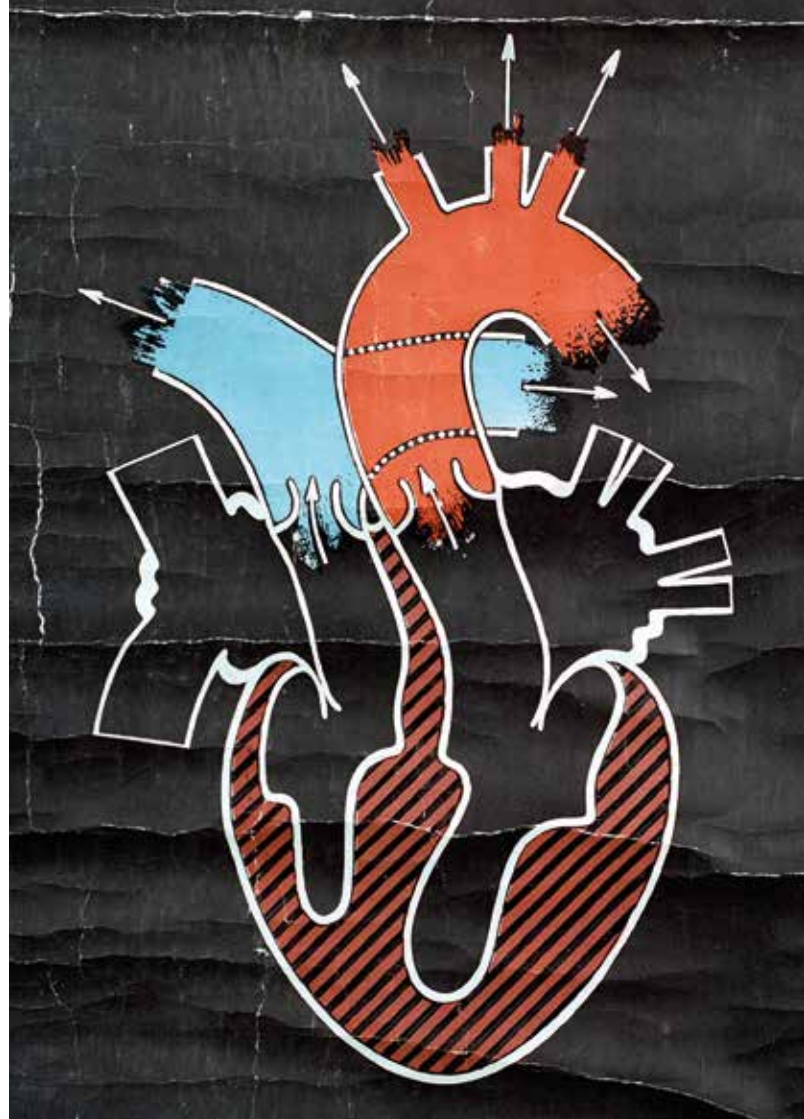
Natasha brought people who claimed to have experienced love at first sight to rural landscape spots and asked them to physically reenact the moment they were struck by love. Their staged actions are at odds with their sublime surrounds. But the dramatic landscapes, together with the subjects' performances, communicate the transformative reality of their experience.

## Experiments and scientific drawings

Natasha Caruana researched and recreated psychological experiments to explore the physiological conditions and reactions related to falling in love. She also sourced scientific diagrams of the heart and circulation systems created for educational purposes. She photographed the empty locations of the experiments including a lift, a lap-dancing club, a rope bridge and a skate park. The analytical intent of the experiments, together with the diagrams of blood moving around the body, raise questions about how external factors may contribute to falling in love. But neither they, nor Caruana, provide definitive answers and the mystery of love remains intact.

'At First Sight' was conceived and produced during Natasha Caruana 2014 BMW Residency Award at the Nicéphore Niépce Museum in Chalon-sur-Saône, France.

*At First Sight 'I Had Seen Her';*  
(Opposite) *At First Sight 'Beating #3'. Courtesy the artist*







## LOVE BOMB

2012 – 2014

**C-type photographs with text and paper.**

**Giclée photograph.**

An image of a small orange and a small lemon shows them punctuated all over with cloves and placed on a sparse wooden table alongside a white wall. It is accompanied by a text describing how they may be used to provoke desire. They sit alongside photographs of other love potions and home-made bombs, each with their recipes transcribed.

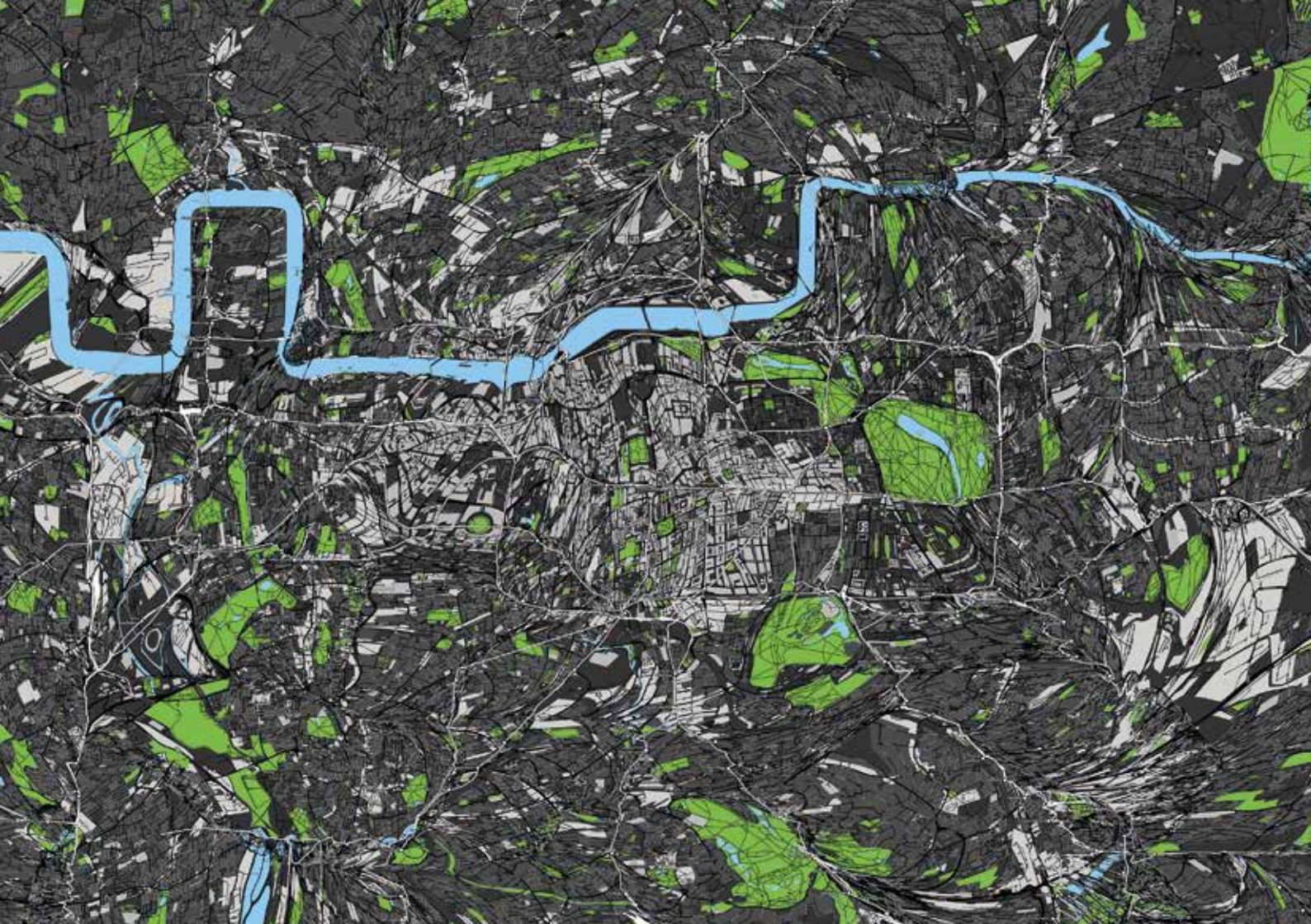
Desperate to sustain love for a former partner, Natasha Caruana hunted love potion recipes and spells online and created and photographed them. As a metaphor for the self-destructive elements of falling out of love, she also collected and photographed online directions for home-made bombs. The display includes 'hate news' – 'small item' newspaper cuttings describing unpleasant acts conducted by disappointed lovers which demonstrate the hate and rancour that populate daily newspapers. Caruana was interested to collect these as an antidote to the dominant, more often 'headlining' perpetual newsfeeds of love and marriage as the ultimate objectives of our lives, at a time when her achieving that felt impossible.



Ellie Harrison, *Vending Machine*.  
(Opposite) Sam Meech, *8 Hours Labour*. Courtesy the artists









(Opposite, above, overleaf) Paolo Cirio, *Your Fingerprints on the Artworks are the Artwork* itself. Courtesy the artists; James Bridle, *AQD Remembrancer*. Photo: ODI; Benedikt Grob and Bertrand Clerc, *Metrography*. Courtesy the artist





## Works on show at the ODI and online

### JAMES BRIDLE

*AQD Remembrancer, 2014*

*ODI commission*

[theodi.org/data-as-culture-2014-collection](http://theodi.org/data-as-culture-2014-collection)

### PAOLO CIRIO

*Your Fingerprints on the Artworks are the Artwork Itself, 2014*

*ODI commission*

[dataasculture.org](http://dataasculture.org)

### JULIE FREEMAN

*We Need Us, 2014 (ongoing)*

*ODI and The Space commission*

[thespace.org/weneedus](http://thespace.org/weneedus)

### BENEDIKT GROB AND BERTRAND CLERC

*Metrography, 2012*

[theodi.org/culture/metrography-2012](http://theodi.org/culture/metrography-2012)

### ELLIE HARRISON

*Vending Machine, 2009*

[theodi.org/culture/vending-machine-2009](http://theodi.org/culture/vending-machine-2009)

### LA SOCIÉTÉ ANONYME

*The SKOR Codex, 2012*

[theodi.org/culture/skor-codex-2012](http://theodi.org/culture/skor-codex-2012)

### SAM MEECH

*Punchcard Economy ODI Knitted banner, 2014*

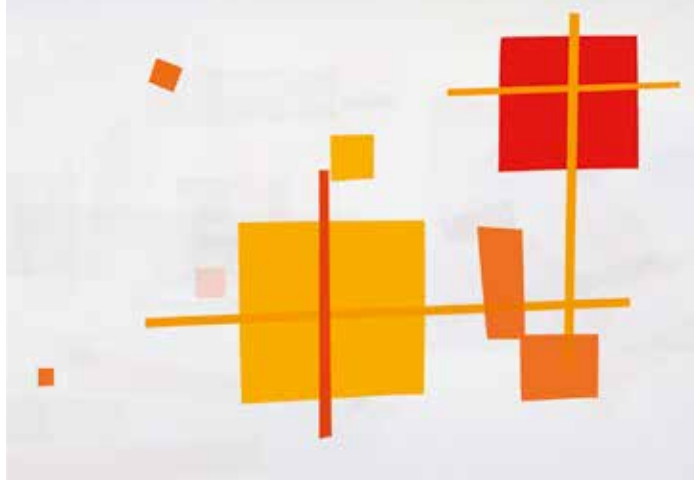
[theodi.org/data-as-culture-2014-collection](http://theodi.org/data-as-culture-2014-collection)

### THICKKAR

*Pink Sheet Method, 2014*

*ODI commission*

[theodi.org/data-as-culture-2014-collection](http://theodi.org/data-as-culture-2014-collection)



Data as Culture engages diverse audiences with artists and works that use or respond to open data as an art material and a subject for artistic research. We exhibit and commission artworks for our space and for external venues, independently and with partners. We have shown works from emerging, mid-career and established artists, and commissioned new works, reaching large audiences in Britain and beyond. We acquire or long-term loan selected artworks from the programme for ongoing display at the ODI.



# DATA AS CULTURE COLLECTION


The Open Data Institute is catalysing the evolution of open data culture to create economic, environmental and social value.

The ODI's Data as Culture art programme engages diverse audiences with artists interested in exploring data. Now in its third season, Data as Culture exhibits and commissions artworks for ODI space and external venues.

For more information please contact  
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[theodi.org/culture](http://theodi.org/culture)



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La Société Anonyme, *The SKOR Codex*. Courtesy the artist