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James Collins / Rachel de Joode / Alwin Lay
July 09 – August 27, 2016
What Birds Can See

DOCUMENT is pleased to present *What Birds Can See*, a group exhibition of works by James Collins, Rachel de Joode and Alwin Lay. The exhibition will open on July 9th with a reception from 5pm to 8pm, and will continue through August 27th.

In her 1956 essay "What Birds Can See," French author Nathalie Sarraute defines the features of what would later be called the "nouveau roman," a radically new approach to fiction writing. Sarraute's main concern is a search for "the unknown, the invisible," which assumes that plots and characters are composed of microscopic and parceled truths. The three artists in this exhibition share a desire to confound the viewer while at the same time investigating processes and searching for what lies beneath surfaces—the beyond of what we can see. They do so by intertwining the roles of analog and digital media in a manner that Charlotte Cotton, in a recent essay, has called "camouflage": "Photographer, painter, sculptor, all three of these terms are highly abstracted and unfixed; they are forms of camouflage that provide artists with temporary positions and relationships within the history of art, but pointedly staged in the context of the present."

James Collins (born 1972, lives in Detroit, MI) uses acrylic and oil paint to produce simulacra of distorted photocopies, scanned images and other types of reproductions, creating an illusion of dimensionality in highly graphic paintings. When it first appeared, photography troubled painting's monopoly on the accurate transcription of reality. Collins reverses this achievement by copying the reproduced image, executing "mechanical reproduction" with a skilled hand and a precise chemistry of materials. On the surfaces of the canvases shown in this exhibition, the artist applied Tyvec, a house wrap material that is currently ubiquitous in his Detroit context.

Rachel de Joode (born 1979 in The Netherlands, lives in Berlin) works in rhizomatic flows between three-dimensional matter, its two-dimensional representation, and its ambiguous resemblance to human bodies. In this exhibition, de Joode presents an ensemble of digital photographs, abstract sculptures made of cut PVC board, and a ceramic sculpture that serves as a hook for another printed PVC sculpture. De Joode documents processes that may go into the finished object, experimenting fluidly across matter, media and their relationship to the artist's hand.

Alwin Lay (born 1984 in Romania, lives in Cologne) examines the life of objects seemingly free of human presence. His contribution for this show is a ten-minute video of an invisible cube, placed on a pedestal of identical scale, gradually filling with blue dish soap. A digital photograph, shown alongside the video, shows us a paint roll fixed with a push pin, its handle suspended in the air. These works' obsessive rationality makes them all the more absurd, in keeping with the artist's characteristically dry humor, while touching on questions of perception and knowledge. It is ultimately autonomy itself—figured as images of illusory "objecthood"—that appears as a trompe l'oeil in his work.

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