



Installation view from "*Identity*", Artists Space, 2011  
Photo: Daniel Pérez

## Dexter Sinister

### Artists Space, New York

Through January 15

by Claire Ruud

Dexter Sinister's "*Identity*," a three-channel projection installed alone in the center of main gallery at **Artists Space**, tells a fascinating story about museums and their brands. While a woman's voice recounts anecdotes from the history of branding museums—centrally, MoMA, the Pompidou, and the Tate—the projections move at an equally measured pace through iconic images primarily in black and white, that correspond to the text. The narrative is a pastiche of the words of others found in newspaper clippings, essays, press releases and letters. Woven together seamlessly, these diverse sources become an absorbing mediation on the tension between the entity and its self-representation, the difference between "what we are [and] what we look like, in other words 'identity' [and] identity."

What makes Dexter Sinister's take on the old question of identity so relevant is its exploration of the relationship between corporate and individual identity. As "*Identity*" points out, the term "**corporate identity**" was coined in the 1950s to express the idea that a firm could paint a picture of itself, a spruced-up image of its best qualities. The idea of corporate identity allows the firm to self-consciously develop and manage a *personality* and, in turn, its *relationships* with individuals, i.e. the firm's employees and consumers. Perhaps, as the firm acquired the traits of person-hood, people began to imagine themselves in the terms of the corporation. By the mid-90s, everyone was talking about developing and managing a "**personal brand**." The idea of branding the product expanded to encompass branding the self: in the workplace, we transform ourselves into products that satisfy the system. (I'm tempted to think that our embrace of the personal brand may also be inflected by the development of a performative self, as first articulated by Judith Butler at the beginning of the 90s. In both cases, one constructs a representation of the self out of the pre-existing possibilities within the system.)

There's plenty of work in the world exploring the space between the self and its representation. But for me, "*Identity*" provides a fresh perspective on this space by revealing another axis of difference that is particularly relevant today: the space between the corporation and person. On a grand scale, the differences between

these entities are being fought out in the courts. In the [landmark 2010 Citizen's United case](#), the Supreme Court ruled for the corporation's personhood (First Amendment rights), and now the [debate's coming back to the court courtesy Royal Dutch Petroleum](#). It is not surprising that the personhood of the corporation has finally reached the courts on such a grand scale. "[The Company Man](#)" legendarily allows his identity to be subsumed by that of the corporation. We've all met young professionals whose devotion to their company's brand—Goldman Sachs and Google come to mind—is strangely personal. In our capitalist system, corporate identity and individual identity have long been deeply intertwined. "Identity" led me to revisit the questions, how much does our understanding of the individual affect our understanding of the corporation, and vice versa. The answer is clear: quite a bit.

Eve Sussman, founder and CEO, one might say, of the [Rufus Corporation](#), once pointed out to Noah Simblist in these pages, "There's a conceit to the Rufus Corporation as well; in this country, you're much more powerful as a company than as an individual. Whether you're ordering two-by-fours or computers or filming materials, the first thing the sales rep asks is 'what company do you come from?' It immediately empowers you on a different level as soon as you are a company. So of course I'm a company. Why wouldn't everyone just be a company?"

*Claire Ruud has an M.A. in art history from The University of Texas at Austin and is pursuing an M.B.A. at The Yale University School of Management. She thinks a lot about feminism, queer theory and financing contemporary art production.*

---

0 Comments

---

© 2008 - 2012 fluent~collaborative. all rights reserved. [view our privacy policy](#).