

# ARTFORUM

## CRITICS' PICKS

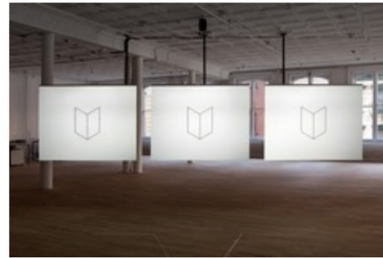
### Dexter Sinister

#### ARTISTS SPACE

38 Greene Street, 3rd floor

October 30–December 18

*"Identity"*, 2011, a new film by the New York-based publishing and design duo Dexter Sinister, is installed in the main gallery at Artists Space, while a model of the Serving Library, the pair's ongoing archival and publication project, occupies an adjacent room. The three-channel film chronicles an abridged history of branding. A narrator recounts historical anecdotes and cites contemporary marketing guru Wally Olins, as well as theorist Terry Eagleton and hip-hop artist Jay-Z, to explain the significance of branding in late-capitalist culture. Projected alternately onto one, two, or all three of the side-by-side screens suspended in the main gallery, trademarked logos and primary shapes exemplify the commercial semiotics characterized in the voice-over.



Dexter Sinister, *"Identity,"* 2011, three-channel video projection, 20 minutes. Installation view.

The film highlights the extension of branding practices from sellable objects to museums—specifically, the Pompidou, MoMA, and Tate. As presented in the film, the branding of museums is the most recent development in a tradition of product placement in the history of art. The narrator claims that this history begins with Bass Ale bottles on the bar in Édouard Manet's *Un Bar aux Folies-Bergère*, 1881–82. The Bass logos in the painting are signifiers that contemporary viewers would easily recognize on a tap handle today.

If identification of the Bass labels manifests the modernist reification of the observer's presence, the museum brand commodifies the viewing experience. The museum markets a prescribed visit that informs an audience's awareness of its place within a larger exhibition space, historical discourse, and cultural environment. The film alludes to Olins's theory that museums now consider how the cachet of their brands plays into their audience members' respective personality profiles. In this way, Dexter Sinister suggests, museums vie with other branded enterprises for popular attendance and attention.

— Zoe Larkins