

A20 | Saturday/Sunday, October 12 - 13, 2013

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

FINE ART | By Peter Plagens

Lyrical Forms, Social Commentary and Handiwork

Société Réaliste:  
A Rough Guide to Hell

◆ P1  
334 Broome St., (212) 334-5200  
Through Oct. 27

It self-effacingly describes itself as a "Mom-and-Pop Kunsthafe" that (not so modestly) "engages with presentation strategies and models to emphasize rupture over tranquility, interference over mere coexistence, transparency over obfuscation, and passion over cool remove." Its current offering by the Franco-Hungarian collaborative team Société Réaliste (Jean-Baptiste Naudy, b. 1982, and Ferenc Gröf, b. 1972) purports (in art-speak) less modestly still to pit "two discrete discursive investigations against each other—the typographic language of global-local media communications and the architecture of anarcho-capitalist modernism."

That sort of conceptual overreach—as common in today's galleries as potted plants were a century ago—is usually fairly off-putting. But with "A Rough Guide to Hell," it shouldn't be. This exhibition is brainy fun.

There are three works in the small, tidy space. The first is a poem—rendered in white laser-cut vinyl in a new font the Société has named "media police" that combines three other fonts in each letter—on two gradually darkening walls. It's called "Circle of Errors" (2013) and is derived from computer error messages. The second is "The Fountainhead" (2010), a full-length appropriation of the 1949 film made from the Ayn Rand novel—but with all the human characters digitally excised so that Rand's individualist-materialist tract is all material and no individuals.

Finally, "Laissez-Faire City" (2013), another riff on Rand: a pho-

tocopy of a 1995 full-page advertisement in the Economist seeking investment in a proposed government-free city in Costa Rica, to be inhabited entirely by rugged individualists. The piece is for sale for a little more than \$62,000, the proceeds purportedly to be used to republish the ad in the magazine at current rates.

A certain lightheartedness (or, dare we say, je ne sais quoi?) pervades the social comment—which is a comparatively mild dig at capitalism—and prevents the exhibition from being dourly arcane.

