

Paul Branca

GOLDEN PARACHUTES

Kreuzbergstrasse 42E,

November 24–December 22

How should painting *act* nowadays, given its market-driven reification and the endless revivals of figuration and abstraction (and their own ready-made gestures)? In “Couch Crash,” his aptly titled Berlin solo debut, New York-based artist Paul Branca explores these questions through nineteen paintings depicting a word or punctuation mark that spell out in black letters on monochrome backgrounds (yellow, red, and dark gray) an awkward, Google-translated line: *HEY JUNGS KÖNNTE ICH ÜBER DER COUCH CRASH, ICH BIN WIRKLICH MÜDE UND KANN ES NICHT WEITERGEHEN* (Hey guys could I crash over the couch, I am really tired and I can’t go on). Beyond the obvious nod to the well-known condition of artists traveling on low budgets, these works develop a multilayered critique through their distribution: Branca invited friends in Berlin to take a painting as a gift on a first-come, first-served basis, which has drastically diminished the show since its opening.

Left in the gallery are nails that once supported the paintings, and three compositions that were made with leftover paint and tape from the words/paintings, which recall early modernist abstractions. These “leftover” paintings are the only ones for sale, and ironically they would actually look good over any couch. With this slyly generous gesture, Branca not only simultaneously frustrates and feeds the status of painting as a primary commodity of the art market. Moreover, he celebrates art as a social event on a local basis, while at the same time placing his works carefully within the current discourses of contemporary art and in the context of important art-historical references—such as Blinky Palermo’s ninety-panel *To the People of New York City*, 1976, which uses the same monochromatic colors. Homage and gift, Branca’s relational paintings have a life beyond the act of their creation and market value.



Paul Branca, *Couch Crash* (detail), 2010, oil on canvas and linen, dimensions variable.

— Eva Scharrer