Eberhard Havekost
at Anton Kern

The houses that Dresden artist
Eberhard Havekost paints,
generic as they are, derive a cer-
tain appeal from their
simplification to near abstraction.
In his second New York show,
he presented 14 paintings (all
1999), some recently seen at the
Galerie für Zeitgenössische
Kunst in Leipzig, that range from
distinctly representational to
abstractly realistic. With two
exceptions that include a single
figure, the paintings are varia-
tions on a theme—views of the
same three or four houses, each
painted from a slightly different
angle, surrounded by a few
trees. The houses are without
distinction or personality, and
Havekost further reduces them to
pure form. He often frames the
image so that we see only a cor-
ner of a house or a half-hidden
detail of the facade, such as a
window with a tree in front of it.
It's not that Havekost teases form
out of abstraction; he accurately
renders scenes in abstract ways.
These are German homes,
although they could just as easily
be average suburban homes in
almost any corner of this country.
They're tidy, but not fussy, just
like Havekost's painting style.

The scenes are beautifully
delineated in crisp, but not hard-
edged, planes of color. Areas of
cream, gray, black and red
describe the houses' walls, roofs
and shadows under the eaves. In
certain areas, the color of the
house appears to be laid over
that of the trees, confounding the
spatial illusion and subtly pushing
the works closer to abstraction.
Although the shadows are
strong, as if cast on a bright
sunny day, his skies are a flat
gray, the kind of blinding bright-
ness when the sun's light is
dissipated but no less intense.

Havekost has previously paint-
ed from video stills, but he used
photographs for these works,
and his source is evident in the
details. For example, trees in the
foreground have a slightly soft
quality—achieved with looser
brushwork—as they would if the
camera lens were focused on the
house behind. In two of the paint-
ings we see the back of a
woman, as she's photographing
scenery. Here, as in earlier figu-
rateive works, Havekost is not as
successful. His painting is more
interesting when it approaches
abstraction, which is the direction
it seems to be going. The most
recent works in the show, for
example, are four views of the
same house that look like rectan-
gular forms in a field of color. In
one distant view, the setting
becomes further abstracted. A
swath of greenish blue in front of
a simple, boxy house could be a
road, fence or stream.

It is both the recognizability of
his subjects and their potential
ambiguity that gives his work
depth.—Stephanie Cash