

Art in America

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

Eberhard Havekost at Anton Kern

The houses that Dresden artist Eberhard Havekost paints, generic as they are, derive a certain 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 variations 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 corner 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 brightness when the sun's light is dissipated but no less intense.

Havekost has previously painted 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 paintings we see the back of a woman, as she's photographing scenery. Here, as in earlier figurative 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 rectangular 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

Eberhard Havekost: *Veneer 4*, 1999, oil on canvas, 51 by 71 ½ inches; at Anton Kern.

