

Modern Painters

"Eberhard Havekost: Sonnenschutz"

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Eberhard Havekost: Sonnenschutz

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Most likely Willem de Kooning was appreciative that Pop art knocked the legs out from under a younger generation that was struggling with how to paint like him without making work that looked like his. Gerhard Richter has been the beneficiary of this housecleaning, and his progeny continue to multiply and prosper. This set-up may read like it's about to go badly here for Eberhard Havekost, but I'm afraid it's much more complicated than that. He's given me a lot of ammunition, not only in terms of how the paintings have been painted, but also in the destined-for-cliché manner in which he has decided to present them. Still, if De Kooning and Richter have taught us anything, it's that things are not always as they seem.

Continuing his practice of grounding each of his exhibitions with its specific location in mind, Havekost has named this show *Sonnenschutz*, which translates as 'protection from the sun'. He's not been to Los Angeles before, so I suppose Havekost meant it as a bit of a joke — one that seems to be reflected in the series of nine small canvases hung in a row on one wall. Titled *Personal Engineering 1-9* (all works 2004), they each depict a rather pale European hiding behind dark sunglasses. However, true to Havekost's goal, after grounding us in their details they steadily take us beyond the stereotyping of Hollywood

to somewhere much more critical. It's a place as much about the progressing entanglement of fiction and reality in film and television as that of abstraction and representation in painting ever since, at the very least Richter — whose paintings are in fact technically quite different to Havekost's.

The four other paintings serve to pull us even further in this direction. *Sonnenschutz 1* and *Sonnenschutz 2* depict the same building façade, complete with a bright red awning, from slightly different (camera) angles. Each features a trapezoid of a too-intense blue sky worthy of an Ellsworth Kelly, and both bring to mind not so much Photorealism as a Precisionist like Charles Sheeler. The third painting is, unsurprisingly, of the sun — albeit of the decidedly symbolist/science-fiction variety (it's also a small canvas, and acts like a full stop on the wall). The final painting, *Snow World (Spiel gegen Depressionen)*, contains — of all things — an image of a landscape from a video game devised to help treat depression. It is the weirdest and most indispensable painting in the show; one in relation to which it is helpful to learn that, in the game itself, the landscape gets brighter and brighter as one progresses through its levels. Its emblematic nature also forced me to consider Havekost's paintings in relation to those of the worthy-of-another-look Konrad Klapheck, but that's a game for another time. TRM

