

ics or curators. Sometimes the artist makes it an inside job, as Andy Warhol has done, ironically, with his recent "Myth" series, or as Jeff Way did in a show he called "Elvis and Jesus."

All Way's images are of Elvis Presley singing or of Jesus-heads in cruciform patterns—the Saviour, King of the Jews, and the King of Rock'n'Roll. Way's thematics generate a sublime spectacle, all the more so in light of the flexibility of that word. For over two centuries, "the sublime" has labeled awesome motifs given bravura treatment—and in Way's pictures of Elvis, our leading martyr-entertainer, big scale and hot colors lurch up to the heights of bravura with speed, if not grace. As for Jesus and the sublime, Protestant revivalists of the last century were in a constant sweat to produce sublime effects with their preaching. They used precisely that word to describe their ambitions, and they applied it to God, as well. Now, Way's Jesus-patterns evoke the sublime of allover painting, at the very least. He has forced an esthetic sublime into close contact with an evangelical variety, an effort he celebrates by filling the gallery, from two to five p. m., with the sound of Elvis singing songs both secular and sacred. Way's tapes also feature performances by such gospel groups as the Mighty Clouds of Joy, the Dixie Hummingbirds and the Swan Silvertones.

The blockbuster painting here is *Elvis (I Was the One)*, a quintuple layering of the singer's image in harsh, color-separation hues. This ensemble appears against a velvety background of black oil paint. Way includes a row of small studies for this work, and another, even more garish Elvis series which shows his face contorted by Way's cut-up method—he quarters a familiar photo of the singer, then rearranges the fragments. Rendered seamlessly by oil paint, these rearrangements are profoundly, poignantly grotesque. Such a simple method—two crisscrossed (cruciform?) cuts—and the image of the King is horribly tortured. In this desperate state, Elvis inspires Way to deck him in colors more gloriously electric and primitive than any Presley's costumers ever found for him.

The Jesus faces which fill the rest of the pictures are cut up and reassembled along the same crisscrossed lines. No two of these faces are the same, yet all are recognizably that of the Saviour. His image is rent, yet He—or it—is still to be seen, imprinted in dismal ochre on harsh pinks and gloomy maroons. There are acidic greens and reds in the Jesus series, too, and the lush, abysmal black of *Elvis (I Was the One)*.

Way has thematized his images with a heavy, almost a brutal hand. His Elvis and Jesus do what an effective art-world spectacle is supposed to do. They confound the pressures of history. Way's spectacle lofts us to a zone of the imagination where the nostalgia surrounding Elvis is scaled up to pop-style grandeur. And this grandeur leads with ease, even with a rough-



Bernd Zimmer: *Cows at Twilight*, 1980, acrylic on canvas, 64½ by 80½ inches; at Barbara Gladstone.



Jeff Way: *Elvis (I Was the One)*, 1980, oil on canvas, 102 by 72 inches; at Pam Adler.

hewn elegance, to Way's evocation of the desperate piety that illumines the revivalist's Jesus.

An obvious difficulty remains. How are we to tell what Way's ambitions

are? Has he drawn on energies outside the art world for esthetic effect, or is he trying to put a pictorial sublime to work as a guide to the sublimities of God—or Elvis? Is Way the apostle of

the Born-again Sublime? Once he was an unregenerate—and undistinguished—abstract painter. In the more recent past he drew on the religious imagery of American Indians. He has also painted landscapes in the spirit of the Apocalyptic Pastoral. All these images—these themes—tended to spirit us away from our historical moment, and now he presents himself as the fiercely dedicated and, to all appearances, utterly sincere bearer of a gospel of salvation through images of these two martyrs, Elvis and Jesus. Does he truly believe in another history, an other-worldly train of events which might, if we let it, rescue us from the doom promised by time's secular unfolding? If he does, it's up to him to make it clear. Or perhaps, by his lights, he has done so already. I have a secular imagination, so I see in his thematics the illusory timelessness of esthetic spectacle. I assume that others in the audience see something similar, but perhaps this is wrong. It may be that Way's artworks are offered as sacred images, more or less. And so, surprising as it seems, it's possible that some of the audience has accepted them in that spirit. In the artist's eyes and those of his viewers who might conceivably be considered his converts, Way's "Elvis and Jesus" may well be images aglow with the Gospel truth.

—Carter Ratcliff

Bernd Zimmer at Barbara Gladstone

One can't deny it: Bernd Zimmer tries hard. Color blazes confrontationally, and shape also tries to mount us, scaled up as it is. Upfront, everything in the pictures presses us with its closeness. But there are telltale signs that this work is *not* really Expressionist, but rather neo-Expressionist, with all the good and bad that means. The surface is too smooth, looking as if it was laid down like a carpet. What roughnesses it has seem too calculated. The size is all-American: the works are like miniature football fields. Above all, there is none of that nervous angularity, that Angst so typical of authentic German Expressionism, particularly of the Bridge group, which Zimmer takes as his point of departure. In the landscapes there is nothing of the combination of the cosmic and the claustrophobic typical of Kirchner's landscapes. Also, the elements of the landscapes—trees, mountain peaks, stones—do not quite achieve figural identity, and so are not as haunting as in Kirchner. And the figures are not absorbed into nature—are neither sufficiently elemental nor erotic, or some combination of both.

In *Bathers (Night)*, it is the formal contrast between the black figures and the blue sea that matters—it is a contrast that generates no charge, but is simply there to be noticed. Similarly, there is no charge between the figures, which are simply "moments" in a field. *Cow Skulls IV* is a little better, for there is death lurking in the heads, and in the wild contrast between the two beasts. But the formal concerns still seem up-