



Jeff Way, *Elvis (I Was the One)*, 1981, oil on canvas, 102 x 72".



Justen Ladda, *The Thing*, 1981, latex paint, tempera, and enamelac on wood chairs and plaster, 9 x 15 x 45". © Marvel Comics Group 1981. Photo: Martha Cooper.

cides with compositions that unnerve. The quietest of the three shows a man putting on his coat in a Hopperesque bedroom. The man is standing between the bed and the window. Outside, it's raining; the neutral meanness of the room and the slashes of rain on the window set a Willy Loman mood. Then, turning it all around—a gun on the bed. This is a pristine evocation of menace.

In Bosman's largest painting (a diptych, in fact), a wall of golden wheat rises by the side of a dirt road. A man stands by the open door of a sedan. In the foreground, in a puddle of blood, is a corpse. A crack in the sedan's windshield hints at a reciprocal violence but does not emphasize it. Here Bosman has beautifully synthesized a genre of Great Plains Gothicism in all its murderous banality.

The most disturbing painting shows a girl (not a woman) rushing into the sea. Standing on the shore is a man clutching a knife. The tension is palpable. The contorted poses of the couple, caught in the steely light that suffuses the painting, produce an incisive delineation of terror. This is the most economical of Bosman's paintings, and it dominates the show.

#### JEFF WAY

Elvis and Jesus: that's electric. The King of Rock 'n' Roll meets the Man from Galilee for a cosmic revival. Whatever Presley's private hell may have been, his public piety never faltered; he gloried in gospel, and, when he sang to Jesus, it felt real. Even toward the end, with his melting-butter body cinched by a Bible Belt of a corset, Presley could still turn an upholstered Vegas sewer

into a dusty revival tent in Tennessee.

Jeff Way's "Elvis and Jesus" show was an intelligent coupling of god and God. Not corny, not smartass, not easy. It could have been all of those things; instead, it was a crisp, multi-leveled meditation on the liberated cliché. Way chose obvious, public-domain images of Elvis and Jesus and made them brand-new. It was a lesson in advanced artistic reclamation. Clearly, Way knows that just because something has taken place doesn't mean it has happened.

Two paintings dominate the show (smaller works are all variations on them). One is of Elvis from his mid-glitter period (before he turned into a side of beef in a satin straitjacket), and it has a hot, color-Xerox palette; but this Xerox is over eight feet high, and executed in oils. Looking like a video image with an out-of-control horizontal band (multiple, ghostly Elvises echo over the full-frame Elvis so that a succession of heads drift down over his chest and into his crotch), it's a wonderfully electric image. With Presley as a formula that's slipping madly out of control, it's both perfectly Presley and a monumentally perverse poster of a painting.

The painting of Jesus is all-over patterning. A grid of heads (in a ubiquitous "Good Shepherd" pose) is organized into a cross through an acidic color scheme. Unlike Presley, who is treated with photographic fidelity, the representation of Jesus is extremely simplistic—gestural daubs of color limning out the suggestion of a face. The heads repeat into Pop wallpaper and here and there, sweetly, an eye winks in the best 3-D, novelty-key-chain tradition. Suddenly, through this idiosyncratic irreverence,

Way establishes a path for Jesus into Elvis country. He makes it clear that all those vulgar, homogenized renditions are exaltations. When Way sends his Jesus and Elvis, transformed but still authoritative, back into the consumer culture that lives off the stability of their allure, he is also reaffirming the worthiness of the artist's pursuit of the last word. No image is final.

—RICHARD FLOOD

#### JUSTEN LADDA, "The Thing," Fashion Moda:

Comic-book characters are a staple of American childhood. Boldly drawn, garishly colored heroes and villains people the imaginations of American children, crossing all barriers of class and race. Monster comics represent the darker, subconscious side of the mythology; the monster is usually a hero-goodness personified at heart but frightful to look upon. Justen Ladda's rendering of the Marvel comic-book character "The Thing," presented in conjunction with Fashion Moda in the South Bronx, is a phantasmagoric site piece that encompasses these archetypal childhood mythologies as well as the political and esthetic mythologies of poverty and Pop art. It is located in an abandoned school a few blocks from Fashion Moda's storefront. An unusually powerful example of site-specific work, it would, in another, more properly art-world environment, become an illusionistic gimmick.

The school itself was apparently closed in the early '70s; unprotected, it has been severely vandalized. What remains is the wreckage of an ongoing war. The building is a shell, showing