

■ GALLERIES

Patrick LoCicero's Pictorial Paradoxes

BY KENNETH BAKER

Patrick LoCicero, whose paintings and prints are showing at the Janet Steinberg Gallery (315 Sutter Street, through Saturday), has a nice feel for the relative weights of images and materials.

He toys constantly with the fact that images — such as the giant vegetables in his paintings — have a specific gravity for the imagination, though are weightless in reality. The weight of the materials that compose an image (paint, paper, sand and varnish, in this case) bears no relation to the mass of the object the image describes.

Self-consciousness about this pictorial paradox is what sets LoCicero's work apart from that of so many other painters who layer images arbitrarily as he seems to do. He plies the paradox to good effect in a print in which a bowling ball teeters on the top rung of an upright ladder.

Each of his paintings is done on a large sheet of paper. The paper is grommeted at the edges and hung unframed on the wall.

LoCicero layers images or image fragments in orderly tiers irrespective of the scale or reality of things they represent. Behind the pepper in "Red Pepper," for example, is a factory building, and behind that, two rows of mawkish cupids.

It is not easy to guess whether

LoCicero intends us to see any discursive meaning in a picture such as "Red Pepper," but we might. The pepper has a vaguely phallic quality that might relate to the cupids. Vegetables — which dominate the present series of pictures — are traditionally symbols of fertility. But what about the factory? Might it symbolize labor's debasement of love and of the spice of life?

It is easier to see LoCicero as making a theme of the loss of shared beliefs that give symbolic immediacy to images. The compensation for this loss, his work suggests, is a gain in the immediacy of images themselves, irrespective of their possible meanings.

LoCicero's prints have almost as much presence as his paintings. They are unframed lithographs in very limited editions, each of which he has altered slightly after printing to render it unique. Here too, LoCicero demonstrates impressive control over the esthetics of his images, although he doesn't seem yet to know quite what use to make of his facility.



Patrick LoCicero's 'Red Pepper,' at the Janet Steinberg Gallery