

ART REVIEWS

By CLAUDINE ISÉ

SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Staple Experiences: Jill Poyourow is fascinated by food: where it comes from, how we prepare it, the ways in which food can connect us to other people and to the past. At Post Gallery, Poyourow's elegantly understated exhibition of paintings and drawings takes us back to a time when her European ancestors labored to produce food staples such as bread, cheese, lettuce, knockwurst and sauerkraut. Like the Germanic cuisine she portrays, Poyourow's low-key paintings offer hearty if not exactly mouth-watering fare.

At first, some of these images appear almost laughably pastoral: a robust farm wife baking bread; a dairy farmer carting giant wheels of cheese past a picturesque mountaintop; a kerchiefed woman tossing plump heads of lettuce into a large bin. The longer you look, however, the less sentimental they seem. You notice the air of meditative concentration on these farmers' faces, and the solitary nature of their labor.

In fact, Poyourow has carefully copied many of



Post Gallery

Jill Poyourow's "Squash Portrait": Hearty fare.

these scenes from photographs in a Time-Life book on German cookery. This gives her paintings a certain bloodless quality, which seems strangely appropriate, given our increasingly abstract relation to the food we eat.

Although she takes food as her starting point, Poyourow's underlying interest is in the nature of nostalgia and its relation to memory and to cultural and familial history. How can we stake a claim to our ancestors' experiences, her paintings and drawings ask, if we've lost our visceral sense of connection to them?

Poyourow's embroidered panels narrow the scope of her investigations, while hinting at the darker side of European history. Stitched onto plain sections of brown linen are "sketches" of stale and fresh yeast cells, starches and ascospores as they might appear under a microscope.

This urge to classify, to weed out the degenerate from the normal, to locate similarities and differences, also describes the prevailing interests of modern science, technology and genocide. Poyourow reminds us that food is at once personal and political, always enmeshed in the complicated web of history.

■ *Post Gallery, 1904 E. 7th Place, Los Angeles, (213) 622-8580, through June 13. Closed Sundays, Mondays and Tuesdays.*