

## Art

# Pictures envelope traditions

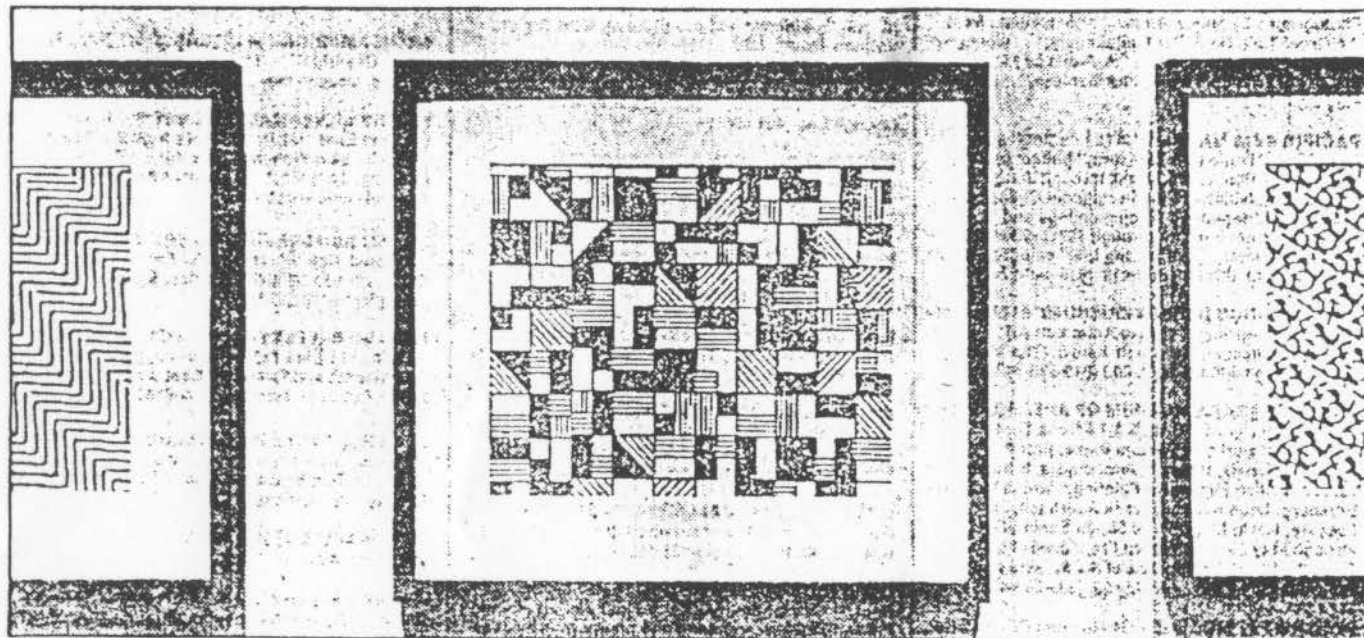
By Christopher Knight  
Herald Examiner art critic

Cindy Bernard's black-and-white pictures call upon the twin traditions of documentary and of straight photography. With the critically analytic hand of a conceptual artist, however, she deftly turns both those modes inside out. A telling consideration of photography ensues.

All 76 photographs, which are being shown at the Michael Kohn Gallery through tomorrow, are pictures of the inside of assorted security envelopes. Used by ordinary businesses, from banks and government agencies to art museums and insurance companies, as well as by private individuals, security envelopes are those printed on the inside with patterns that prevent snoops from seeing what documents are inside.

Sometimes the patterns are composed from non-figurative squiggles and mottled blotches. Elsewhere they're composed from business logos repeated across the paper — the Merrill-Lynch bull, say, or the Wells Fargo stagecoach.

Either way, Bernard photographs them with the straightforward and unreflected nose of the most serious



James Runeson/Herald Examiner

**A pattern of perspective:** Cindy Bernard arranges pictures of the inside of "Security Envelopes" in grids.

documentarian. Her pictures are instruments conveying pure information, but the associations that come with their subject matter are as heavily weighted with social overtones as the Depression-era photographs of Dorothea Lange.

At the same time, Bernard conjures the aestheticized tradition of straight photography of the 1940s. As rigorously as Aaron Siskind, whose photographic close-ups of shingles and tar-paper walls transform mundane matter into abstract compositions, Bernard emphasizes

the linear and shows everything on a single, flat plane. Picturing the envelopes intimately, she undercuts their impersonal, take-it-for-granted quality.

The tension between fact and commentary that characterizes a documentary picture dramatically abuts the tension between the recognizably obvious and strangely fresh in straight photography. Suddenly, all such viewpoints are starkly revealed as theoretical and conceptual.

Given our easy willingness to look at photographs and unthinkingly suppose we are seeing the "real," this is no small achievement. As effectively as the best security envelope itself, Bernard's photographs literally stop you from "seeing through them."

What	"Cindy Bernard Security Envelopes"
Where	Michael Kohn Gallery, 313 N. Robertson Blvd.
When	Through tomorrow
Info	271-8505