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Lisa Kokin

At the beginning of the decade, Lisa Kokin, finishing her MFA at the California College of Arts and Crafts, drew exceptional attention for an installation called *Remembrance*. It consisted of 10 pale shirts suspended on wires over 10 scattered large, dark sacks. Numbers on the sleeves alluded to concentration-camp inmates and therefore implied that the bags contained their worldly goods.

Kokin, who started her career in the late '70s as a batik artist, was taking a new and perhaps more personal direction. She said, "I am interested in representing the human condition by way of the objects we leave behind."¹ The piece had a powerful impact in its expression of both evanescence and residue and also because of the irony of its materials: the shirts, translucent and nearly weightless, were made of hog gut, seemingly inappropriate to represent Jewish life. Yet in 1996 the work was purchased for the Buchenwald Memorial, at the site of the former German concentration camp. The textile form and fibrous material evoked both physical and emotional memories through relationship to the body.

Kokin's Romanian grandmother worked in a New York City textile factory, her grandfather at one time owned an auto seat covering business and her parents ran an upholstery shop where she played with scraps as a child. Much of her work, however, is less specific to textile materials than it is to the textile processes of repeat and accumulation. Another installation, *Loss*, consisted of 90 moneybags she found at a local dump; she saw them as conveying melancholy, functioning anthropomorphically. She has also made artist's books using found materials. One of them, *Orphan Catalogue* (1993), is exhibited attached to a pink tricycle.

Three major themes in her work are Jewish heritage (though not the practice of the religion), social consciousness and feminism.¹

In later works Kokin has constructed overlays of texture and reference by attaching small objects to the surface of larger objects. Some are amusing but inconsequential, such as *I Know It's In Here Somewhere*, a purse covered with toy fragments, ribbons, screws, springs and the like. *Insecurity Blanket* (1994) is a map of existence, stitched and embellished with objects. Similarly poignant is *Pair* (1995), the combination of a child's saddle shoe and a woman's red high heel, with tiny miscellaneous objects attached like charms. This and other works using children's materials suggest an attention to the passage into adulthood that was a widespread theme in artworks of the '90s, perhaps the result of a millennial tension. But they depend on the voice of the found objects rather more than her earlier works involving stitching, photo transfer and other actions imbuing meaning.