

A Complicated Kindness

85" tall

2007

A Complicated Kindness takes its name and was inspired by the main character Nomi in Miriam Toews' novel of the same name. Nomi grapples with a dysfunctional family, sex, drugs, and school; all against the backdrop of the unforgiving religious community she cannot escape. She longs to break away from her Mennonite community, yet she longs for its comfort of security. She is riddled with adolescent angst. Feeling that her hands are tied, she longs for freedom.

The primary fabric of the dress has been created using free-motion embroidery - piecing together small scraps of silk and cotton. The act of free-motion references Nomi's longing to break away, and the slow disintegration of all that was stable in her life. The sleeves of the dress have been elongated, wrapping around the body - reminiscent of a straight jacket and the feelings of constraint. The small Peter Pan collar suggests a child's dress, while the more tightly fitting bodice of the garment acknowledges Nomi's growth and emerging sexuality. The use of the colour white references Nomi's innocence, yet it is tinged with an off white, suggesting the slow corrosion of innocence and purity. The texture of the material also hints at the feathers of the chickens in the factory where she would inevitably end up working should she remain in the community.

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