

ASSEMBLAGE: LAKE COUNTY

By Karen Kovacic

Begin with this box, common as a star chart,
and blow into it till something shows up:
maybe the dim clarinets of Standard Oil
with flaming bells, or rows of white
oil tanks like hatboxes for giants, each
with a curvy staircase dangling like a ribbon.

Build boxcars and houses, your grandmother
lurking in the doorway like a witch,
your elfin grandpa painting ducks
on stakes to poke into the lawn.
Add your mother in a red headband,
who just lost a baby, and your father

drinking a shot and a beer, probably bored,
though you wouldn't have guessed it then—
elements you once thought frozen
like the plot of a fairy tale
with death a gory ornament
and not the unhappy end.

Time lurched slow like the freight trains behind the house.
In the Chevy's backseat you'd shut your eyes
over the humming bridges and open them
only at the Sinclair dinosaur guarding the oilfield.
You wanted to run up a staircase like Cinderella
and spin like a weathervane over that concrete forest.

So arrange the black car, white tank,
paper stars on a circle of blue.
Dangle old folks and parents
from a heaven of steel and smoke.
Then paste in seven-year-old you,
all umbrella skirt and kitten face,

now your grandma's age and waving from a different door
as the cars and bikes and children of the world stream past.