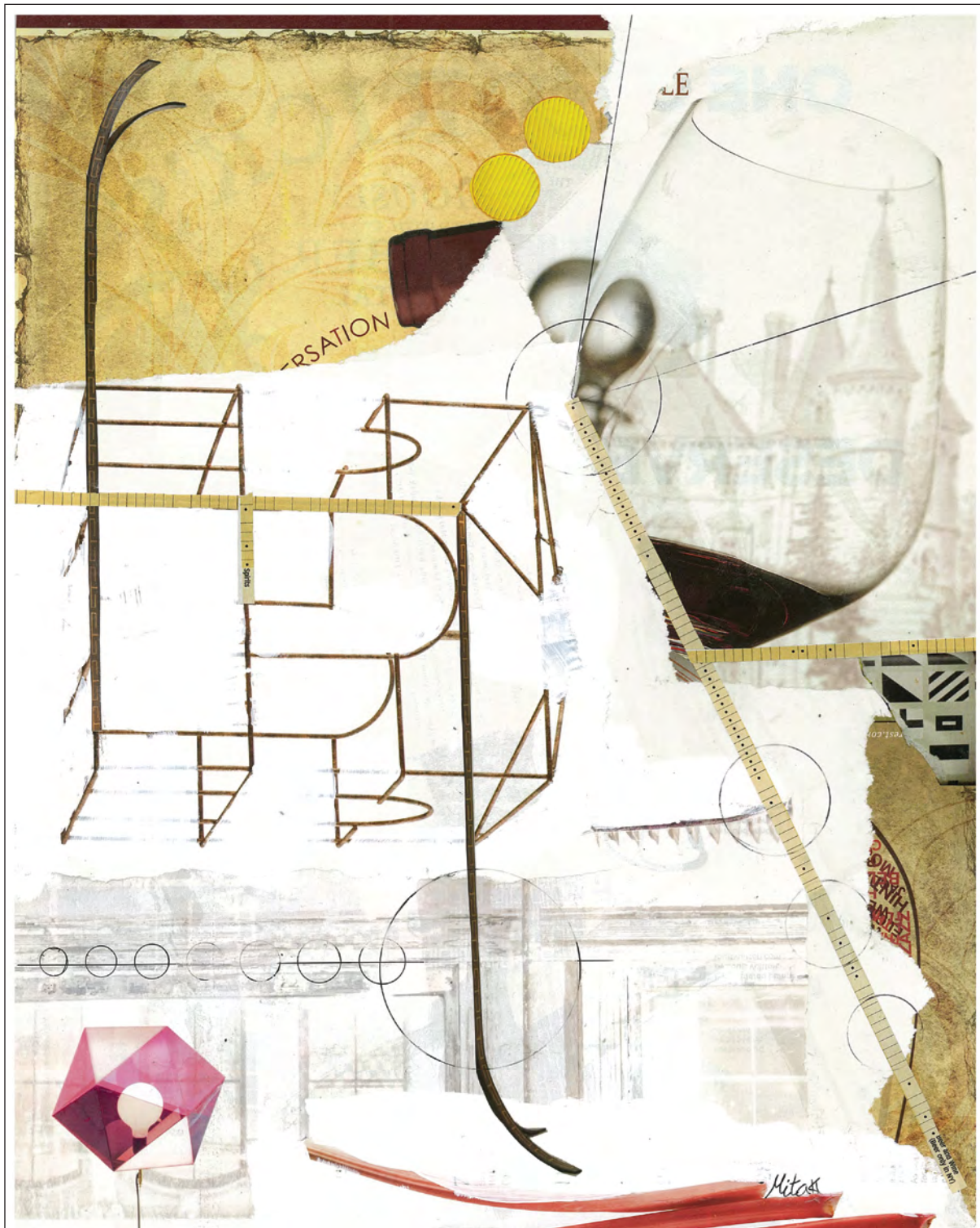


MICHAL (MITAK) MAHGEREFTEH

Venex, 2013
mixed media, 11 x 14 in



courtesy the artist

MICAH PERKS King Of Chains

Chain, chain, chain, chain, chain, chain
Chain, chain, chain, chain of fools

—Aretha Franklin

The showy, greased handlebar moustache and flashy biceps were unusual on a milkman, but otherwise everything looked kosher: the creaky black wagon with the word *Cream* painted in white script on the side, the large silver can jostling in the back. The horse was reined in at the service entrance to the Winchester Spirit House. The man shaded his eyes against the bright Central California day and looked up and up and up at the never-ending mansion. He said later that it reminded him of an enormous gingerbread house from that fairy tale, gaily painted and vaguely Swiss-looking like that. He recollected the milk can, leapt off the seat, set his knees, and hefted the large silver canister onto the doorstep, mumble-swearing as he eased it down. Flourishing his cap theatrically, revealing a shiny bald head and a gold hoop in his left ear, he asked the servant who answered the door if she wanted him to haul the can into the house for her. She shook her head, said, “Nobody gets in here.” The man climbed back into the wagon, clicked his tongue at the horse. He said later that the place had given him the creepy-crawlies, and he was glad to see the back of it.

The can sat for several minutes in the late afternoon sun. Then servants came out, heaved it up, grumbling to each other, and hauled it into the house. Inside the can, up to his neck in milk, was Harry Houdini.

Please, I’ll explain. That year, 1915, I was covering the San Francisco World’s Fair for *The Examiner*, my first full-time job as a reporter. We’d been rocked and almost wrecked in 1906, so this celebration showed the world that everything in Frisco was copacetic again. I covered the fair right from the beginning, with headlines like “Wonder of Wonders” and “Heady Times These.” Alexander Graham Bell placed a cross-country phone call, Thomas Edison showed off his storage battery, Henry Ford created an automobile extravaganza. General Electric covered the exhibition in tiny lights: even the boats in the harbor twinkled. The centerpiece of the whole shebang was the Tower of Jewels. One of my stories detailed the 102,000 pieces of glittering multicolored cut Bohemian glass used in its construction.

The World’s Fair was the bee’s knees, as we used to say, but by November, as the fair was winding down, I was having to do a little digging to make my weekly deadline.

I reread the official brochure, and the last paragraph