OUVERTURE

ELIZABETH PEYTON

MEICOST ETTAL

LUDWIG AND JOSEPH KAINZ, 1993. CHARCOAL ON PAPER, 29 X 22". COURTESY GAVIN BROWN'S ENTERPRISE, NEW YORK.

I am overdrawn again. Leaving the ATM lobby, I step onto 23rd St.and into the chilly rain. I walk to a hotel where famous people have died, some murdered. Key in hand, room 828 becomes mine alone. This room, like all the other rooms in the building, contains unnamed histories, buried behind the stucco walls. Countless unrecorded intimacies — and with its single bed, one would guess they were mostly solitary. There are pictures here telling stories about people that I know. They are not my friends but their stories are familiar to me. I play a game with myself and try to guess who is who just from the clothes they wear and the places they are in. I've heard about a Bavarian prince who went to Versailles to walk the walk of Louis XIV, and my mother was listening to the radio with her sister when Princess Elizabeth made her wartime radio address to the children of the empire.

Somewhere on a shelf at home there is a gossipy novel that details the toilet habits of the hero — one Napoleon Bonaparte. I lie down on the bed and close my eyes. I am riding on a horse, round and round a stable for hours and hours, counting the miles until I arrive at my final destination — Paris, where the Sun King died. I open my eyes and six inches from my face is the Winterhalter portrait of Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and their children. It is in the National Portrait Gallery in London. And there in the National Portrait Gallery, also looking at the painting, catalogue in hand, is Queen Victoria's great great granddaughter, now a queen herself. Rolling over, I gaze out the window. A man is sitting in his underwear on a terrace of an apartment opposite reading the *Sunday Times*, making the most of this bright warm November day. What else have these pictures been witness to in this sad little room, watching time pass here, pondering their own exquisite ennui?

Meicost Ettal is an artist and writer based in Philadelphia.

Elizabeth Peyton was born in 1965 in Danbury, CT. She lives and works in New York.

Selected solo shows: 1987:Althea Viafore, New York; 1992: Water Closet, Novocento, new York; 1993: Hotel Chelsea, Rm 828, New York; Gavin Brown's Enterprise, new York.

Selected group shows: 1993: "Okay Behaviour," 303 Gallery, New York; "Little Thing," Randolph St. Gallery, Chicago (traveled); ; 1994: "Swan," Tom Cugliani, New York; "Don't Postpone Joy of Collecting Can Be Fun," Austrian Cultural Institute, New York.

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