

MAIA SNOW

In Between, 2013
oil on panel, 44 x 36 in



courtesy the artist

ELIZABETH ROSNER

Gravity

The Trip

Long-distance, I tell my father I want to go to Germany, and I want to go there with him. He says, “Maybe. We’ll see. I don’t know.” When my occasional questions become persistent, he asks me for the first time in my life if we can talk about something else. I have to touch my lips with my fingers to understand that I am pushing too hard, he is asking me to stop. So I stop. I tell myself he will talk when he is ready. And six months later we are preparing for the trip.

He has been discovering yellowed envelopes stuffed with photographs, his mother’s old postcard collection, certificates telling incomplete stories of birth, marriage, divorce. Lost in this paper world, he remembers in spurts and rushes, an “allergy attack” pouring sadness through his head, though he won’t admit it. “Look at this, I wonder what this is.”

At the last minute we almost cancel: there is a crisis at work, it’s impossible for him to leave, all the planning is no good against catastrophe. He can’t tell me the truth—that he wants to change the subject, change directions, change everything. The night before our flight, he says we can’t go, and I wait for him to decide he can do it: turn with me toward the edges of what is dark and hidden. The past is holding him back, pushing him forward. And we go.

Almost Beautiful

Our hotel is on Schäferkampsallee, a street in Hamburg where my father used to live. From the cab window he points and says he doesn’t remember the street being this wide, says he is surprised the trolley cars are gone. I imagine spidery arms reaching into a tangled web of charged wires, tracks embedded in cobblestone streets, electricity crackling overhead. We listen to the silence.

My father is a German who will speak no German, and I, forbidden to learn it in school, studied Spanish instead. There were no German products in the house, not for twenty-five years after the war, not until he bought that steel-blue Krups shaver to hold against his cheek in the harsh bathroom light after another almost forgotten nightmare. “You’ve got to admit,” he said, “Germans are good at what they do.”

The subway, he tells me, still smells the same: over-ripe fruit and wet leaves and salty air damp from the sea.