

# ARTFORUM



Seth Cameron, *The Fair Mountain (Once upon a time)*, 2019, gouache, Flashe paint, and ink on watercolor paper, 60 x 40".

MIAMI

## Seth Cameron

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6315 NW 2nd Ave

January 10–February 8, 2020

In the suite of eleven delicate, laconic paintings on paper that make up “The Fair Mountain,” Seth Cameron tells the story of a hapless people, a band of “many farmers and many inventors” who have exhausted their natural resources. The tale begins in neat calligraphic script stacked at the bottom edge of the first painting: “Once upon a time / there was a fair crown / who lived on a fair island / under the dim glow / of the waning moon.” As the laborers toil beneath this fading light, they harness its energy, eventually sapping its glow. The crown emerges to offer a parable about a “fair mountain” whose denizens drew too much light from the sun. The laborers quickly recognize their circumstances in the story. As the narrative progresses, storyboard-style, across the gallery’s walls, the palette shifts accordingly: The saturated grays and reds turn to an unmodulated field of black and ultramarine blue. The darkness then gives way to airy,

pastel hues of orange and lavender as the crown recalls the mountain people's plight, and the suite returns to darkness at its conclusion.

Abstraction is said to preclude narrative. What Cameron achieves is a quiet, compelling marriage of the two. The works resist pedantic assumptions of seamless congruity between text and image, but Cameron's ability to exploit the matte qualities of gouache and Flashe produces a range of formal effects that rhyme with his characters' experiences. And whereas the profligate farmers and inventors squander their lot, Cameron works with a measured, deliberate hand, relying on minimal shapes and colors to convey the story's tone.

Almond shapes recur throughout the show, sometimes arranged in symmetrical clusters, perhaps representing the ill-fated characters. With a particularly striking passage in the final painting, the eye must work to differentiate muted black, blue, and maroon iterations. We are left in the dark.

— *Ade J. Omotosho*