

Oluwaseyi Alade's *Pilate Washes His Hands*

by [John Kohan](#) in the [March 2024](#) issue

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(Courtesy of the artist)

The gospel story of Jesus before Pilate has echoed down the centuries in numerous accounts of rulers and public officials who engage in wrongdoing and pass the blame to others. The Roman governor's gesture of washing his hands has become synonymous with moral cowardice and the evasion of responsibility. In this vivid monochrome drawing, Nigerian artist and illustrator Oluwaseyi Alade emphasizes the timeless dimension of Pilate's infamous act by omitting clues about where and when.

There are hints of faces in the background shadows with the billowing towel, but Alade focuses our attention on the powerful but disembodied arm and hand of Pilate under the streaming water. The dubious motive behind this rite of self-cleansing is suggested in the way the open hand all but conceals a clenched fist. The viscous cascade pouring down could easily pass for blood, and the heavy drops cause a dramatic ripple effect on the surface of the basin. In this symbolic tableau, the denial of responsibility has grave consequences for the individual and society.

Alade says she views the world "in minute dots" and can spend 30 hours making the detailed markings that come together in images like *Pilate Washes His Hands*, one in a series of pointillist drawings she created of the Passion of Christ. "My works are deeply influenced by my faith in Christ," she says. "In using black and white in this way, I want to project the somber mood of all he went through from his betrayal to his resurrection."