

EMMANUEL BAKARY DAOU

Malian, born San, Mali, 1960

Campagne de lavement des mains (Handwashing Campaign) and Stop Ebola

From the series *Le temps Ebola (Ebola Times)*, 2016

Chromogenic prints

19 11/16 × 29 1/2 inches each (image)

Irwin and Andra S. Press Collection Endowment Fund purchase, 2018.10.1 & 6

As a cultural anthropologist who has studied the policing and militarized dimensions of Sierra Leone's Ebola response, I see Emmanuel Bakary Daou's series *Le temps Ebola (Ebola Times)* as a stark, satirical reading of government and community responses to the deadly Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014–16. In *Campagne de lavement des mains (Handwashing Campaign)*, a thin, old man with a white goatee casts his gaze toward something in the distance as he holds his hands up and out in front of him, fingers spread in the image's foreground. Compressed into the background, a few relatively young observers watch as two masked people in jumpsuits, rubber gloves, and boots crouch over the old man, pointing their disinfectant spray, soaps, and hand sanitizer in his direction. These masked individuals are presumably health workers involved with the handwashing campaign referenced in the title. "Campaign" in this case, carries a double meaning: in this "war" against the virus, handwashing is both a weapon against the foe and an indicator of compliance with evolving public health norms that include frequent handwashing, contact tracing, and arcane rules for "safe burials" of Ebola dead. Has the old man violated those norms? Has he not sufficiently protected himself against the common enemy? The masked figures are poised to pull the trigger. Looking closely, we see that these figures are not wearing standard personal protective equipment (PPE). One has fashioned foot coverings from old packaging. Their masks are constructed of soft foam. Who are they? The masks' exaggerated features accentuate their power to conceal and reveal, their ability to represent and evoke the vigilance and surveillance crucial to public health work in a viral emergency. In fact, Daou staged these photographs with hired actors in Mali, which counted eight Ebola cases and six deaths, magnitudes fewer than its southern neighbor, Guinea. Along with the photograph *Stop Ebola*, which features a Bamako street scene of two mock-PPE-clad health workers standing over a corpse-like figure wrapped in plastic, the staged images vaguely resemble crime scenes: who is responsible; who will investigate; whose point of view will matter?

—Adia Benton

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