



21 ICONS  
SEASON II  
SOUTH AFRICA

*Adrian Steirn*



## MEDIA RELEASE

**Embargoed until 7 September 2014 at 12h00 (SA)**

**Johannesburg – 7 September 2014** – Grace Masuku: “In my culture we've got a saying: every parent is your parent, every grandmother is your grandmother.”

On 7 September 2014 at 20h27 on SABC 3, the acclaimed series 21 ICONS South Africa will feature the sixth icon of its second season: renowned traditionalist, conservationist and environmentalist Grace Masuku.

As a descendant of the Bakgatla ba Kgafela people Masuku has worked tirelessly to preserve the tradition and culture of the Batswana people. She has established numerous community outreach projects aimed at improving the lives of her community and restoring their traditional respect for the environment. The preview is available on YouTube.

21 ICONS is a showcase for the South African spirit; a tribute to the men and women who have helped to shape our country and, indeed, our world. The series is part of an annual project which features unique narrative portraits and short films by Adrian Steirn, one of the continent's pre-eminent photographers and filmmakers.

On her selection as an icon, Steirn comments, “Mmakgotla Grace Masuku is a wonderful example of the diversity that characterises a country like ours, which is home to a broad range of South Africans, who have a strong respect for their cultural traditions and environment, while always displaying the utmost humility. She is also deeply rooted in her community and strongly believes in the Ubuntu creed that “without you, there is no me”, and she represents a South Africa that many of us have left behind.”

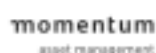
The beautiful portraits included in the projects will be sold at a charity auction later in the year, with funds donated to the charity of the icons' choice.

Steirn's portrait of Masuku appears in the Sunday paper alongside the collectible poster. It features Masuku standing outdoors in front of a black backdrop, becoming part of the land she stands on as roots surround her feet and legs – a reference to her connection to African heritage and culture, as well as her work with medicinal herbs and plants.

In an intimate conversation with Steirn, Masuku talks about her life as a community leader whose role as a healer and environmentalist has seen her not only working with key international bodies (including the IUCN), but also becoming a custodian of her culture. She has established museums to preserve the heritage of the Batswana tribe. Her desire to keep old customs alive is driven by her belief that losing touch with the moon, the stars and the land is equal to letting go of the hand that guides all of life's most important processes.

Masuku says that, growing up in a community where there were no boundaries between families, it was inevitable that she should feel an intense connection to humanity. She's equally connected to nature – again, not surprising, since nature has been very much a part of her life since early childhood. “Wherever we went, our elders would point out what this plant could be used for, how that plant could be used...We weren't even aware that, as they were doing it, we were attending a school of some sort.”

Unaware she may have been, but there's no denying that Masuku's life is entwined with the rhythms of the land around her and, by extension, with the people who share that space. It's the best way to live, she insists,





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commenting on the sadness of life in the city, where people have “become alien to themselves” as they chase intangible goals.

Masuku’s life stands as a stark contrast: she has always strived to be an anchor of the community, a role she first fulfilled by qualifying as a teacher before going on to become a school principal. While she may have bid farewell to the classroom, her work in education continues in the broader sense: her goal now is to ensure that her people understand the importance of their culture, that they do not lose their essence by becoming beguiled by the conveniences of a modern world and thus lose sight of who they are.

Although Masuku is happiest and most alive when with the members of her community, she has kept august company, having attended college with former archbishop and fellow icon Desmond Tutu. As befits someone who values humility above all other attributes, she dismisses notions of his greatness, describing him as “just like any other boy you know”.

She adds that so many other people from that era have gone on to enjoy remarkable achievements. “There were so many of us that became important in our own way. This is something I wish our children could see when they are in the classroom – the impact you have when your goal is to make life better for others.”

#### **PROGRAMME SYNOPSIS**

Educationist, conservationist and environmentalist Grace Masuku shares with filmmaker and photographer Adrian Steirn the early influences that shaped her understanding of the importance of nature, and how man cannot live separately from the land. She also explains how this interconnectedness extends to create a web of community, and discusses her philosophy that true happiness is simply accepting these connections, and your own role within them.

#### **About 21 Icons South Africa**

21 ICONS South Africa is an annual collection of photographs and short films of South Africans who have reached the pinnacle of achievement in their fields of endeavour. These men and women have been an inspiration through their extraordinary social contribution. It is not a definitive list and does not denote any ranking.

The short film-series documents the conversations between Steirn as the photographer and filmmaker, and the icons. Each short film provides insight into both the subject and photographer’s creative approach to the portrait.

Season two of 21 ICONS South Africa is proudly sponsored by Mercedes-Benz South Africa, Momentum Asset Management, Nikon, Deloitte and the Department of Arts and Culture.

Season two debuted on Sunday 03 August continuing for another 20 weeks, one of 21 short films will be screened every Sunday on SABC 3 at 20h27.

On each of these Sundays, a poster of the icon’s portrait, taken by Adrian Steirn and his creative team, will be published in the City Press to form a memorable collection that everyone can own.

Media partners include SABC 3, City Press (Media 24), Provantage and Mxit.

#### **Social Media:**

21 Icons engages with the public through:

Twitter: @21Icons

Website: <http://www.21icons.com>

Mobisite: [www.21icons.com](http://www.21icons.com)

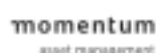
Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/21Icons>

Pinterest: <http://www.pinterest.com/21ICONS/>

iTunes App Store: <http://tinyurl.com/lf3cfzm>

Google Play: <http://tinyurl.com/ovtcy45>

On behalf of **21 ICONS South Africa**





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