



21 ICONS
SEASON II
SOUTH AFRICA

Adrian Steirn



MEDIA RELEASE

Embargoed until 5 October 2014 at 12h00 (SA Time)

Johannesburg – 5 October 2014 – Tebello Nyokong: “We need to know the past so that we do not repeat its mistakes, but if you live in the past, 50 years from now on you’ll still blame somebody else for something you could have corrected. We really have to move forward as much as possible.”

On 5 October 2014 at 20h27 on SABC 3, the acclaimed series 21 ICONS South Africa will feature the tenth icon of its second season: Tebello Nyokong, renowned scientist, chemist and professor at Rhodes University.

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.

Steirn comments, “I’ve met many people whose stories are incredibly powerful – it’s a true privilege to discover more about the human spirit and share these individuals’ personal accounts, their positive character traits and their propensity to influence and shape perceptions and transform societal norms for the better and thereby impact the communities around them.”

Steirn’s portrait of Nyokong appears in the Sunday paper alongside a collectible poster and will be sold at a charity auction next year, with funds donated to the charity of her choice.

The image features Nyokong in a field dressed in traditional garb and surrounded by sheep, but over her dress she wears the white coat of a chemist.

The picture is a representation of her standing as award-winning and internationally recognised scientist who is at the cutting edge of cancer research, yet also acknowledges her younger years in Lesotho. While growing up in this poverty-stricken environment, Nyokong says she never aspired to anything more than owning a pair of shoes. “You didn’t dream too big, because in that environment there aren’t many people who have gone far.”

This may be why, although she is the recipient of such prestigious awards as the Unesco L’Oreal Award and the Order of Mapungubwe, and was named Shoprite Checkers Woman of the Year, she quips that her greatest career highlight was being given her own parking bay when she was made a professor at Rhodes University!

On a more serious note, Nyokong’s work on cancer treatments is breaking new ground. She humbly insists that she is just one of several contributors, but it’s clear that her contribution is a significant one. Nyokong’s research focuses on photodynamic therapy, a form of treatment that uses the dye responsible for giving denim its blue colour. Unless activated, the dye is completely harmless; however, when exposed to a red laser beam, it generates toxins that kill cancerous cells without affecting healthy ones. This makes it one of the only cancer treatment therapies that does not have severe side effects.

One of Nyokong’s most striking features is her humility. In spite of the vital contribution she is making to her field, she does not believe that she is more important than anyone else. “I completely object to the notion that any one person is more special than anyone else in this world. We are all good at what we do. We just have to find a way of understanding what we want to do, and not ask for shortcuts.”

Her empathy stems, possibly, from the challenges she endured as a student, and the determination it took to overcome them – as well as the triumph she ultimately experienced in reaching her goal. “After school I knew that



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I was a scientist, one way or the other. How far I would go with the science - I did not know. I didn't know what chemistry was about, I didn't even know what I would do with chemistry, but it was challenging and I liked it."

What is, perhaps, most interesting about Nyokong's story is that it started in that field with those sheep. "I learnt a lot from being in the fields. You have to learn the birds. You have to learn the sounds. That is science, you know. You had to learn in the field what kind of plants grow and are edible, and so science started there in my view. I think that is when a scientist was born."

PROGRAMME SYNOPSIS

Scientist, researcher and Rhodes University professor Tebello Nyokong talks with filmmaker and photographer Adrian Steirn about how she went from shepherding sheep to become one of Africa's pre-eminent scientists.

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

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>

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