



21 ICONS  
SEASON II  
SOUTH AFRICA

*Adrian Steirn*



## 21 Icons' tribute to Nelson Mandela

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**Johannesburg – 5 December 2014** – “Nelson Mandela’s legacy is the South African community. Every breath we take stands as a testament to his sacrifice. As we move forward, his contribution becomes an organism that lives and dies with the choices that we make as South Africans,” says Adrian Steirn, co-founder and director of 21 ICONS South Africa.

Nelson Mandela, a monumental figure who was, and is, revered by many, touched billions around the globe with his compassion, honesty, integrity, tolerance and empathy. When he died the world went into mourning and there was a dreaded sense that one of the last men who stood for peace, justice and equality had been returned to the earth.

Condolences poured in from around the world. Dignitaries and diplomats, prime ministers and presidents, lords and ladies, domestic workers and teachers, lawyers and children came together to grieve and pay respects to the most admired and respected of all world leaders of the 20th century.

This year, 2014, will mark half a century since this unwavering activist stood on trial for his opposition to apartheid. Facing the very real prospect of execution he delivered his famous Rivonia Trial speech in which he declared he would prefer to live, but was also prepared to die for a free South Africa. It is also a year since the great icon passed and the world tried to make sense of the loss and reshape their realities.

"During my lifetime I have dedicated my life to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons will live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal for which I hope to live for and to see realised. But, My Lord, if it needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

Inspired by the life of Nelson Mandela, 21 Icons, a visual celebration of the lives of men and women who have carved pivotal moments in our nation’s progress and our new democracy, and it tells the stories of people who have continued his legacy – whose lives have made the world a better place. The project seeks to celebrate those who have achieved success and widespread recognition, as well as individuals whose work has been conducted without prior acclaim.

After spending 27 years in apartheid's prisons, Mandela became South Africa’s first democratically elected president in 1994. He united a fraught and fearful country, bringing together blacks and whites when South Africa was living through violent and troubled times.

When Nelson Mandela stood on the steps of the Union Buildings on 10 May 1994, South Africa was a divided, scared and angry country. Instead of seeking revenge for his years in prison and the oppression of his people, he extended his hand and began the journey of uniting this diverse country into a rainbow nation. Through sheer strength of character and the warmth of his personality he took the country from the brink of war to the blossoming of hope.

What is most notably remembered by many was his generosity of his time with people. Everyone wanted to meet him, even for just a snatch of conversation or a handshake. Many sought a philosophical conversation or a stirring debate. And he generously gave attention to many.

Mandela was a man of wisdom and insight and he strove to inspire citizens to become the leaders of tomorrow. He believed education was the most powerful weapon to change the world and was steadfast in his intolerance of



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racism. "No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."

At the end of his presidency he continued to work for a better South Africa, mainly through his many foundations. In his autobiography *Memoirs*, fellow 21 Icon Ahmed Kathrada recounted that he and Mandela affectionately called one another *madala*, isiZulu for old man.

"Charming and charismatic, he has both a magnetic personality and a commanding presence," Kathrada wrote.

"An uncommon amalgam of peasant and aristocrat, he is a living paradox: a democrat par excellence, with just a touch of the autocrat; at once proud but simple; soft yet tenacious; obstinate and flexible; vain one moment and humble the next; infinitely tolerant but also impatient."

Indeed, he is missed, but his legacy lives on...

#### **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>

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