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JANUARY 22, 2016

21 ICONS SEASON THREE (A FUTURE OF A NATION) FEATURES KOPANO MATLWA MABASO



http://sacreativenetwork.co.za/2016/01/21-icons-season-three-a-future-of-a-nation-features-kopano-matlwa-mabaso/dsc_215

Matlwa Mabaso has been selected for 21 ICONS South Africa Season III as a voice for the new generation of South Africans with issues such as race, poverty and gender and coming to grips with their sense of identity. She is also advocating for healthcare more equally accessible and for establishing educational support programmes.

On her selection as an icon she comments, "My discomfort provoked me to write. Growing up in post-apartheid black, young South African, I was grappling with my sense of identity in a very complicated country. So I wrote

A University of Cape Town (UCT) and Rhodes scholar, she holds an MBChB from UCT and an MSc in Global Health from the University of Oxford.

She says, "I could never choose between medicine and writing. Anton Chekhov said, 'Medicine is my wife, and writing is my mistress' and that makes complete sense to me. I love them both."

Matlwa Mabaso co-founded Waiting Room Education by Medical Students, a health promotion organisation that educates their families on common health conditions in the waiting rooms of mobile clinics.

"As a doctor you have the unique privilege of listening to people's stories. They tell you things they would never care deeply about people's stories so for me, medicine and writing make sense together," she adds.



(http://sacreativenetwork.co.za/2016/01/21-icons-season-three-a-future-of-a-nation-features-kopano-matlwa-mabaso/dsc_695/)

Pretoria-born Matlwa Mabaso was just nine-years-old when South Africa birthed its democracy in 1994. In her first novel, *Coconut*, published in 2006, she writes about her experience growing up as a young black girl in the new South Africa and the challenges associated with finding a sense of belonging.

Labelled a “Coconut”, a South African stereotype regarded a slur, she tells Van Wyk how the novel unpacks what it means to be young, black and beautiful in the new South Africa, where fitting in can be at the cost of one’s own identity.

“I write about things that I find difficult. *Coconut* began when I was in high school, trying to figure out my own identity. What was considered to be good was everything white and the challenge of finding a place and meaning as a black young woman. *Spilt Milk* came from grappling with the South Africa that I live in – I write about what bugs me,” she says.

However, she believes that the commonalities between individuals far outweigh the differences; “We are all human. We all think we are. People struggle with identity all over the world, which is one of the things we have in common.”

Coconut earned Matlwa Mabaso the 2007 European Literary Award – of which she was the youngest ever recipient – and the Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa, considered by some to be the African equivalent of the Nobel Prize for Literature.

She released her second novel, *Spilt Milk*, published in 2010, which touches on South Africa’s nation-building journey and the importance of social unity through active citizenry; “To be South African is to inherit a painful but courageous history. South Africa is looking at how we can do things better and I love being a part of that.”

In 2012, she founded the Transitions Foundation, an organisation that attempts to improve the performance of schools across the gamut of educational needs.

When asked about her thoughts on the recent events surrounding #FeesMustFall she enthuses, “I can’t remember being as excited about South Africa as when I watched those young South Africans who took to the streets to demand a new South Africa that we’ve always been and it’s great to see that South Africa back again.”

For the portrait '*Imagined Reality*' which will appear digitally on the Monday after her short-film is released, Va visual elements, "Using various props, a colourful 'wonderland' is constructed that echoes Matlwa Mabaso's lo characters, health solutions, and deconstructing embedded cultural ideas, like 'coconut' and 'the rainbow natic multiple palm tree leaves wearing a rainbow charm necklace – a severed coconut to her left and milk spilling to imagined as the conjurer of a fantasy world that breaks boundaries through creativity."

On the future of South Africa she says, "I am very optimistic about our rainbow nation. Maybe it needs to be re imagined but there's a sense that it is ours. Young people are going to lead and it's such an exciting time."

She concludes, "I think it's a misnomer that we go abroad to learn and come back. As South Africans, we have s world, and our continent has so much to contribute. This is the place people will be looking toward in the futur

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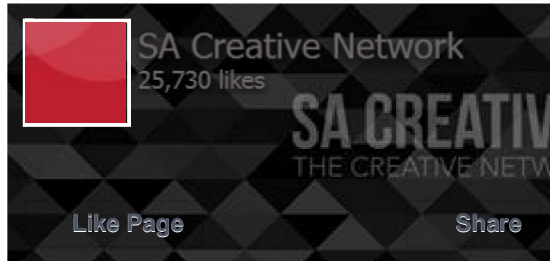
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