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21 Icons Project Features Laduma Ngxokolo

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21 Icons is a visual celebration of the lives of men and women who have shaped the world around them for the better. Inspired by the life of Nelson Mandela, it tells the stories of people who have continued his legacy – whose lives have made the world a better place.

Laduma Ngxokolo "The Explorer" is photographed wearing his garments while seated on a white horse in the middle of Long Street in Cape Town. Playing on the idea of a rural boy delivering his wares to the city, the portrait delivers a striking blend of modern and traditional, and speaks to a generation navigating the combination of both.

Ngxokolo has been selected for 21 ICONS South Africa Season III for using traditional Xhosa beadwork motifs and patterns, to establish MaXhosa that celebrates the rich heritage of the Xhosa culture through providing traditional clothing for Xhosa initiation rituals. MaXhosa by Laduma is proudly knitted in South Africa with South African mohair and merino wool. Although producing locally has its challenges, Laduma says he improvises where necessary. "Producing locally isn't as easy as producing offshore, for instance. The material is more expensive and suppliers don't offer the best. Knowing I am contributing towards growing jobs and the economy makes it worth my while."

21 Icons : Laduma Ngxokolo : Short Film



In 2010, Ngxokolo established his knitwear range, MaXhosa that is inspired by the deeply rooted essence of the blanket in Xhosa culture. He is the recipient of the 2014 the Emerging Designer of the Year Award at the African Fashion International Awards, Ngxokolo beat out 10 other African designers to win the inaugural Voque Scouting for Africa prize. An ambassador for

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TODAY WEEK MONTH ALL

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SIGN U NGXOKOLO TREND REPORT	2
TREAD + MILLER FOOTWEAR STEP INTO STORES	3
H&M EXPANDS RELATIONSHIP WITH DAVID BECKHAM TO CREATE A NEW WARDROBE FOR MEN	4
MENSWEAR DO'S AND DONT'S BY THE SUITABLEMAN	5
STYLE AND WHISKY MEET FOR JOHNNIE WALKER'S BIGGEST EVER CAMPAIGN	

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African fashion, he is utilising the resources and inspiration we possess to create a unique voice that can be understood and appreciated across the globe.

In the Eastern Cape Xhosa communities, young men between 18 and 23 undergo six months of intense training in circumcision schools before they're initiated into manhood. Part of the ritual involves replacing all their clothes – holdovers from their boyhoods – with new ones, including high-quality knits. Because few local sources are available, initiates typically turn to imported brands like Pringle of Scotland and Lyle & Scott. "As a person who has undergone the Xhosa initiation ritual," Ngxokolo says, "I felt that knitwear brands like these bear no aesthetic resemblance to Xhosa traditions."

“*Hard work opens any doors. Also, people should not focus on the success of external subjects but focus on themselves and their own work as everyone is unique.*”

In 2014, Ngxokolo won the Emerging Designer of the Year Award at the African Fashion International Awards and he was invited to present his work at the What Design Can Do conference in Amsterdam. A few months later, he was invited to showcase the collection at the Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Berlin, which won him the Premium Emerging Designer Award for his menswear range. He was then invited to exhibit MaXhosa at the Premium exhibition in Berlin and Munich, Germany. In November, he showed a collection at Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Africa.

In February 2015, Ngxokolo beat out 10 other African designers to win the inaugural Vogue Scouting for Africa prize. Ngxokolo told Vogue Italia that his designs were inspired by Credo Mutwa, Nelson Mandela and Steve Biko.

As the winner, Ngxokolo will get a chance to present his designs at the international showcase of Palazzo Morando in Milan, Italy, in September this year and at the Africa International Fashion Week in Lagos, Nigeria in December 2015.

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