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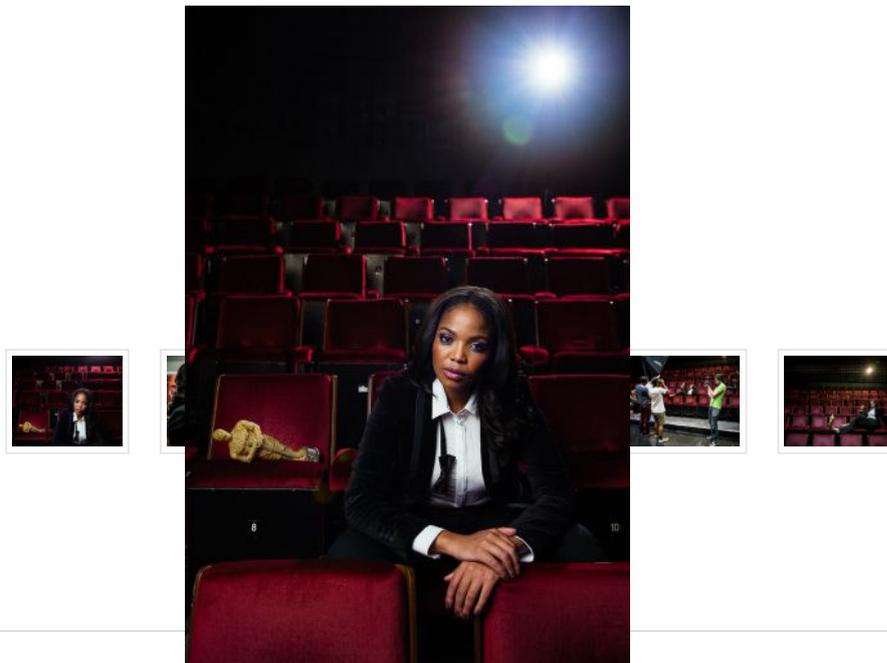
Actress and producer Terry Pheto shot to international fame when Gavin Hood's *Tsotsi* (2005) claimed the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film in 2006. The compelling film starred two young unknowns, Presley Chweneyagae and Terry, and went on to feature at several of the top international film festivals, including Toronto, Bangkok and Edinburgh, reaping awards from audiences and critics.

For Terry, it was just the beginning. A decade on, 21 Icons is celebrating this literal leading lady for her successful career in the South African and Hollywood film and television industries, as well as her work in promoting gender equality in both the industry and in society.

In the spotlight

Both of these aspects of her achievements are captured in Terry's 21 Icons portrait. In the image, Terry wears a tuxedo and bowtie, and is seated in a theatre, with a beaded Oscar replica and a no-nonsense expression. She calls it the most empowering photoshoot she's ever done.

Despite the seriousness of the image, Terry jokes it was 'a lot of make-up and lighting' that made her who she is. In fact, throughout the accompanying short film (featuring a discussion between Terry and principle photographer Gary van Wyk), she's quick to laugh and poke fun at herself. It's a disarming kind of charm and a deep thoughtfulness that is revealed – two aspects that give her both on- and off-stage magnetism.



Starring roles

It's been a long journey, though, from her childhood home in Evaton township in southern Gauteng to a portfolio career in film. A young Terry first caught the acting bug with a lead in a primary school play, but ultimately began studying IT before dropping out for financial reasons. Then she joined the Soweto Community Theatre Group, and signed with a talent scout. Then came *Tsotsi*...

Terry went on to have a recurring role on the popular soapie *The Bold and the Beautiful*, and in local and international films including *Catch A Fire* and *The Long Walk to Freedom*. She also served as a juror for the International Emmy Awards in 2015.

Leading in more ways than one

In 2010 Terry established her own production company, Leading Lady Productions, which works to promote women in the film industry. It is a response to the sense of loneliness and lack of mentorship that she experienced. She now sees herself as playing this 'big sister' part for others, as well as continuing as a storyteller – actor, director and producer.

About 21 Icons

21 Icons is a photographic and short film project focused on our national icons and leaders. The third season icons are all under the age of 35, and were selected as youth leaders and inspirational stories about the direction South Africa is heading in. You can engage with 21 Icons on Twitter with the hashtag #OurFutureIsNow.

For more coverage, check out our stories on the third season so far:

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- [Phindile Sithole-Spong](#)
- [Ashley Uys](#)
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- [Ludwick Marishane](#)
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Celebrate some of our brave and visionary leaders: Sophia Williams de Bruyn, Lillian Cingo, Nadine Gordimer, Helen Sebidi, Yvonne Chaka Chaka, Evelina Tshabalala, Gcina Mhlophe.



lifestyle

21 Icons celebrates Michaela Mycroft

The ninth 21 Icons portrait (Season III) features ballroom-dancing, mountain-climbing ability activist Michaela Mycroft. #ourfutureisnow