

Prof Nyokong in 21 icon series

STAFF REPORTER

In the iconic photo, Tebello Nyokong, renowned scientist, chemist and Rhodes University professor is pictured in a field of sheep, dressed in traditional gear covered by her white lab coat. This Sunday, she will be featured on SABC3's 21 ICONS series that captures human achievement through photography, film and narratives.

The Professor of Medicinal Chemistry and Nanotechnology has said on many occasions that her achievements are directly attributable to tending sheep as a young girl in the mountains of Lesotho.

"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," she said in a 21 ICONS press release. "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."

"After school I knew that 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."

Well, she has gone to the very top of her profession. Her list of achievements includes the Unesco Eötvös Award, the Order of Mapungubwe and Shoprite Checkers Woman of



Tebello Nyokong during the portrait shoot in Atlantis, Cape Town, for 21 Icons.
Photo: Adrian Steirn

the Year, mostly due to her ground-breaking work in cancer treatment.

Nyokong's research focuses on photodynamic therapy, a form of treatment that uses the dye responsible for giving denim its blue colour. The dye is harmless unless exposed to a red laser beam, which causes

it to generate toxins that kill cancerous cells without affecting healthy ones.

This makes it one of the only therapies involved in cancer treatment that does not have severe side effects.

21 ICONS showcases South African spirit and pays tribute to the men and women who have

helped to shape the country and, indeed, the world. The project features unique narrative portraits and short films by Adrian Steirn, one of the continent's pre-eminent photographers and filmmakers.

Accompanying each short film is a black and white portrait of the icons that will be sold next year at a charity auction, with funds donated to the charity of the icons' choice.

Nyokong is the 10th icon on the second season of the programme, which airs Sundays at 8.27pm.

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