

# Nelson Mandela

'Mandela represents an image of possibility, the ability to rise beyond impossible differences and conflict to imagine and make real a reconciled, more just, more equitable South Africa.' - Kumi Naidoo, Executive Director Green Peace International. (video)



21 ICONS of South Africa: Nelson Mandela. (Image: Adrian Steirn)

**21 ICONS South Africa** is a photographic and short film series, launched on 28 July 2013 with a moving short film about the man who inspired it all - Nelson Mandela. Filmed while Madiba sat for the portrait shoot at his home in Qunu, Eastern Cape, in 2011, it revealed a Mandela who handles the hustle and bustle of the crew with his usual aplomb and sense of humour. "Is that okay for you? Should I adjust it?" photographer Adrian Steirn asks Madiba as he positions the mirror into which the statesman must peer for the photo. "You can adjust the size of my head," quips Madiba with the self-deprecating humour the world has come to love.

The resulting portrait shows Mandela's image reflected in the mirror - looking at us as we look at him. "Nelson Mandela has come to symbolise hope for many South Africans. He is a man whose life and principles have captured the imagination of the world. I wanted to shoot a portrait that reflected his legacy - a legacy that we can all carry into the future by sharing his integrity and belief that a bright future lies ahead," says Steirn. "I asked Madiba to hold the mirror and look into it as if reflecting on his life. And when you look at the portrait, I hope the viewer is prompted to reflect on his legacy and on our future."

## A life-changing experience

The original, signed portrait, will be sold and the proceeds donated to charity including the Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital. This initiative in the making, honours Madiba's life-long commitment to the wellbeing of children and, once completed, will become a state-of-the-art specialist paediatric academic and tertiary referral hospital providing child-centred services to the children of Southern Africa, irrespective of their social and economic status. In Mandela's words, this hospital will be a "credible demonstration of the commitment of African leaders to place the rights of children at the forefront".

It was his admiration for Madiba that inspired Steirn to create **21 ICONS South Africa**. "I set out to meet and photograph Nelson Mandela. And when that happened it changed my life," he says. Steirn formed a relationship with the Mandela family that led to him being invited to photograph the statesman on both his 93rd and 94th birthdays at his home in Qunu. "To spend time with him and his family was amazing. To be there and absorb it all and to get an understanding of the love, the dynamics that goes on, was incredibly intimate."

From these meetings flowed the inspiration for celebrating Madiba and all the other icons in South Africa who have shaped our country. It was important for Steirn to bring the message across that Madiba may be the most revered icon, but that he had not acted alone.

Moreover, Madiba will be the first person to agree with this - he has been known to have a severe dislike of being deified. He has never liked being singled out for greatness and always strived to remind people that he is just human and not better than anyone else is. However, he has always recognised that he could put his remarkable legacy and people's admiration for him to good use to make things better for the poor, the marginalised, and the oppressed.

## A president with the personal touch

His humility is substantiated by what Greenpeace Africa director Kumi Naidoo recounts to the **21 ICONS** team about his second meeting with Mandela, when he was still president of South Africa. Naidoo and a group of young people and adult learners - people who had just learned to write their names and were still trying to acquire literacy skills - were waiting to meet Mandela and everybody was wondering what they would say to their icon and how they would have to address him. "So they said to me: 'When he comes, what should we say? Should we say comrade, should we say president, should we say Madiba?' So I said, say whatever you want - he's very relaxed, you know, just be yourselves. And this one young girl said to me: 'I can tell him thanks for making time to see us since he's such an important person.' Yes, that's a good line, I said."

"So Madiba comes out of the cabinet meeting, says 'Hi Mr Naidoo' and then he turns to the people and says: 'Thank you all for coming. I know how busy you all are. I'm so privileged that you had time to come and see me.' And in that one moment the gap between the leader and the led was compressed."

Another icon in the series, FW de Klerk, says about his first meeting with Madiba: "My immediate impression was he was a man of integrity, he was a man of substance, he was a good listener, he was logical in his approach. His greatest attribute is his warmth to people, the true interest he has in them."

Sophia Williams De Bruyn comments: "South Africa's got a great tremendous number of great men and women of high values and integrity, like our icon Nelson. They are all unique in their own way and have contributed immensely towards bringing the country where it is today. Mandela came back [from prison] and having gone through all of that hardship and pain, he still had the capacity to forgive so many ugly things, and therefore we should really live in his example and practice that example."

And, among other things, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu reminds us again of Madiba's great sense of humour. "They had the World Cup for the Homeless and somebody took a picture of me kicking a ball. Nelson Mandela said they must tell me I must act my age."

This is the man the world loves and admires, and **21 ICONS South Africa** is proud to bring viewers a beautiful, uplifting reminder of his exemplary legacy.

**21 ICONS South Africa** is proudly sponsored by Mercedes-Benz South Africa, Nikon and Deloitte and supported by the Department of Arts and Culture.

## Short film synopsis

We take an exclusive journey with Adrian Steirn to Nelson Mandela's home in Qunu, Eastern Cape, and experience the warmth and intimacy that permeated the atmosphere during the portrait shoot. We also hear what others have to say about the greatest icon of them all.

Viewers and fans of **21 ICONS South Africa** will be able to follow it on Twitter: [@21icons](https://twitter.com/21icons); view on the website at [www.21icons.com](http://www.21icons.com); or comment at [www.facebook.com/21icons](https://www.facebook.com/21icons). Also see [WWW.21ICONS.COM](http://WWW.21ICONS.COM).



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