

Oliver Hermanus

"Cinema is powerful. It can inspire viewers and give people a sense of identity." - Oliver Hermanus



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The 21 ICONS three-minute film examines the rise of Oliver Hermanus and how his films have gained global praise for their unflinching examination of the challenges of the post-apartheid landscape.

Hermanus has been selected for *21 ICONS* South Africa Season 3 for addressing uniquely South African social issues through cinematic commentary. He has written and directed three feature length films since his debut in 2009 and won numerous international nominations and awards for his work.

His first feature, *Shirley Adams*, premiered at the 62nd Locarno Film Festival. The film is about a mother who struggles to deal with the gunshot injury that disabled her son and providing for the two of them. A deeply moving portrait of ordinary courage in present-day South Africa, it captures the claustrophobia, intimacy and hushed anguish surrounding the tender daily routines of a mother and her child.

In 2011, his film *Skoonheid* was announced as one of the films to be screened at the 64th Cannes Film Festival in the Un Certain Regard competition. It was the fifth South African feature film to be invited to the festival. Hermanus won the 2012 Best Director award at the South African Film and Television awards, and *Skoonheid* was selected to represent South Africa as the official entrant to the 2012 Foreign Film Academy Awards nomination.

His third feature film, *The Endless River*, stars French film star Nicolas Duvauchelle as an ex-pat living in South Africa whose wife and children are murdered by a gang. It debuted at the 72nd Venice Film Festival and was the first South African film invited to the festival's competition.

Hermanus grew up in Montanna in the Cape Flats, and moved across country during his childhood with his family before returning and settling in Cape Town when he was 12.

"South Africa made me who I am, in terms of what I make and what I do now. I'm committed to living here and working here. I don't want to go to America to make movies," he says.

Years later he started his undergraduate degree in Film, Media and Visual Studies at the University of Cape Town which he completed at the University of California after receiving an exchange programme scholarship.

In 2006, Hollywood film director Roland Emmerich offered him a private scholarship to complete his Master of Arts degree at the London Film School.

When he returned to South Africa, he worked professionally in documentary film, journalism and screenwriting as well as press photography; "I ended up working at the *Cape Argus* and the *Cape Times* where I met Gary Van Wyk. That part of my life influenced making movies but I also think I wouldn't be as interested in telling social real stories if I hadn't worked in press."

About the portrait

For the portrait '*Deep Connection*', Van Wyk describes the visual elements, "Hermanus is pictured holding a TV set in front of his torso, on which an image of the director beside a sprawling river is seen. A literal reference to his work within the medium and to the title of his award-winning film, *The Endless River*, the portrait also holds a more personal significance.

Van Wyk continues, "The image on the screen was taken by me five years ago when Hermanus and I worked together in press photography, bringing both myself the photographer and Hermanus as the subject full-circle, referencing a deeply personal journey of creative success for both of us."

Hermanus concludes by saying, "The South African film industry has never been bigger than it is right now. New, younger voices in film are still going to emerge, but the industry is still in its teething phase. We're infants still, but we're going to learn to run sooner or later."

View the video

The short film-series documents the conversations between Gary Van Wyk as the photographer and filmmaker and the icons. Each short film provides insight into both the subject and photographer's creative approach to the portrait.

Behind each portrait lies a carefully planned concept that captures not only the essence of each icon visually, but also in spirit and in terms of their unique legacy.

Season three of 21 ICONS South Africa is proudly sponsored by Mercedes-Benz South Africa.

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