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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: PROFESSOR NOMBEKO MPAKO – ACTING DIRECTOR SCHOOL OF ARTS – UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SPEAKER	TRANSCRIPTION
DR. MALKA	Hello, I'm Dr. Amaleya Goneos-Malka, welcome to 'Womanity – Women in Unity'. The show that celebrates prominent and ordinary African Women's milestone achievements in their struggles for liberation, self-emancipation, human rights, democracy, racism, socio-economic class division and gender based violence.
DR. MALKA	Joining us in studio today is Professor Nombeko Mpako who is currently the Acting Director of The School of Arts at the University of South Africa which encompasses several departments, one being the Department of Art History, Visual Arts and Musicology which Prof Mpako chairs as its head. She studied at the University of Fort Hare where she obtained an honours degree in Fine Arts and Higher Education Teaching diploma; she obtained her masters in Art and Design Education and a PhD in Art Education at the University of New South Wales in Australia. Welcome to the show in our series on Heritage Month.
PROFESSOR MPAKO	Thank you.
DR. MALKA	Prof Mpako you've lectured creative arts programmes at various institutions of higher learning like the Lovedale College for Continuing Education, Border Technikon, Walter Sisulu University and currently at UNISA; at heart you're art educator. Can you please share with us what made you pursue a career in art education?
PROFESSOR MPAKO	Well what made me pursue it, it was after my teaching experience 'cause I started teaching at Lovedale College which was a college for continuing education which was for in-service teachers. Just before the independence the Ciskei government decided to open this college to upgrade all the teachers that were in the system but did not have a diploma or a matric, those were the teachers that used to have PTC after grade....the current grade ten which then was at JC, they would go and do a teachers diploma so that college was opened in 1988 and then I had just....I was doing my honours at University of Fort Hare at the time so I was one of the first....in fact I was one of the first academics that were recruited to start the college from scratch and I was recruited to teach visual arts education.
DR. MALKA	That's very pioneering.
PROFESSOR MPAKO	So then from there I went to....after two years of my Lovedale experience I was recruited to go and teach at the then Ciskei Technikon which was also a new technikon in the Ciskei which later on changed its name to Border Technikon and then from all that experience of teaching...because I went to do my art education in Australia after I had been teaching for ten years so I already knew exactly what aspect of my career I wanted to follow and I was very passionate about teaching so when I went to UNSW (University of New South Wales) I decided that I wanted to do art education because at that time masters was an exit level for a fine art degree, if you want to do anything else you'd have to do art history or you'd do philosophy or you'd do education and in South Africa we didn't have universities that were offering an integrated art education programme which specifically talks to the arts, not just a

	<p>general didactics degree. So I wanted to be an art educator because when you start at university you go to university, especially for me I went to university after my son was born because I wanted to provide for him and then I was looking for any degree that I can get and then art....because I was already thinking I was a bit creative because I was...I used to do some dressmaking, self taught dressmaker as well as cake making so I thought that would work, but I didn't know at the time what careers involved so after ten years I chose to do art education because I knew exactly what I wanted to do.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And staying with the theme of education most school curriculums creative subjects like art tend not to receive the same weighting as opposed to mathematics and language skills in terms of the importance of the role in youth development, but when we look at things like the World Economic Forum Future of Jobs Report from 2016, interestingly creativity ranks third on the top of the skills list needed by 2020, critical thinking is second and complex problem solving is first; given our changing world and the different types of skill sets required in the future, what skills do you consider that the arts develop?</p>
PROFESSOR MPAKO	<p>Well the arts develops the constructive thinking, I always say...I was actually saying that this morning with the teachers that at primary school level we are not teaching children to be artists but we are educating children through art, so that is the point of departure then how do we do this? We develop various capabilities such as constructive thinking, for example today they were doing a sculpture using amaterials and they had to think about what materials I have to use and how am I going to put these materials together and also constructive thinking is what we do all the time because before you do anything you construct it in your mind. I also quote the book "as a man thinketh..." that says that everything that we do is as a result of our thoughts, so constructive thinking is the first one and then the second one is imaginative because we have to imagine...imagine things for things to happen, like dreaming and then there's also sympathetic understanding which is empathy; when children are working with materials they develop that empathy, if he's making...a child, she or he is making a model of her mum or even of her doll that is a baby, they start thinking about how I can handle this baby and how I can handle my mother that I am making because I am passionate about it. I remember in the last month when we were doing the month thing at UNISA, we invited Thuli Madonsela and Thuli was saying the problem with our upbringing of the children is that we buy boys guns and cars and then we buy girls dolls and then we wonder why our male counterparts are not able to be passionate and compassionate about childbearing, so there's a lot of development capabilities that you are developing of children; confidence, assertiveness and everything else we can think of, but we are not really focusing at primary school yet.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And those are important life skills to have...</p>
PROFESSOR MPAKO	<p>...yes...</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>...because besides having your functional components of understanding the subject matter whether it's maths or English or Zulu, if you don't have the gel which can go in-between which gives you those social and life skills, you're not going to function as a whole person.</p>
PROFESSOR MPAKO	<p>Yes, that's true. For example I just want to make a reference to...in addition that the arts teach children to make good judgement about</p>

	<p>qualitative relationships unlike much of the curriculum in which correct answers are the ones that are ruling. For example in art we teach them that you can find there are different ways like that term that there are different ways of killing a cat, there's not one good answer, you can find ways of dealing with it.</p>
DR. MALKA	So it's all about creativity....
PROFESSOR MPAKO	...yes...
DR. MALKA	...at the end of the day. What do you think needs to be done to include art programmes in the curricula more intensively?
PROFESSOR MPAKO	You've heard that South Africa has the best policies?
DR. MALKA	Yes.
PROFESSOR MPAKO	<p>We do have a policy on that art must be taught at all schools. During the 1994....that was the reconstruction and development programmes of the ANC, one of the decisions that was taken was that art must be made compulsory from pre-school up to grade nine, meaning that all the children that are at primary school must learn arts, not just art. The Curriculum 2005 referred to the now creative art discipline as Arts and Culture, it was incorporating all the four arts; music, visual arts, dance and drama. So as long as 1998 these art subjects were implemented but the problem is not with the policy, it's with the implementation strategy. Now the problem is that because of the legacy of the apartheid that we did not have art education in black schools, we have shortage of suitably qualified teachers and now for the government to bring these arts subjects as an equity process without looking at how we're going to develop the implementation of them, for example the infrastructure is a serious problem. If you look...compare the black schools and the so called Model C schools that used to be the government schools for whites during the apartheid regime, they've got infrastructure, they've got studios for teaching art, they've got libraries, they've got everything and then...and they also have suitably qualified teachers and our black schools we do not have suitable qualified teachers because of that legacy and now the new policy says all children must be exposed to art, must teach art from grade one or grade R up to grade nine, and who's going to teach it and that actually brings me to my project that I'm doing. The project that I'm doing I'm trying to actually intervene, it's an intervention strategy that is not going to make further damage by saying let's take teachers and put them to school like the Lovedale model because the Lovedale model was taking teachers out of school for two years and they go to Lovedale College and study, we can't afford to do that.....</p>
DR. MALKA	...no, we need the resources...
PROFESSOR MPAKO	...so then we have to now look at a schools based professional development that is going to assist the teachers whilst they are still in their jobs.
DR. MALKA	<p>I think it's a noble initiative and definitely something we need and looking at creative innovation programmes to achieve it so that the day job gets done but also we're being able to enrich people so that they're equipped with preparing their lessons and teaching the students. Now art formats are incredibly diverse from painting to song lyrics, sculptures, architecture, fashion, you spoke about performance arts with theatre, dance, textiles to even body art with tattoos but they encapsulate expressions, they reflect concerns of the day and sometimes they may be controversial to emphasise a</p>

	point; can you share with us some examples of how women's issues have been depicted in art?
PROFESSOR MPAKO	Well what comes to mind is the artist that inspired me when I was doing undergraduate...
DR. MALKA	...yes...
PROFESSOR MPAKO	..which was Judy Chicago who was a...who is an American feminist who was using non-conventional material to make art because you know before art used to be called fine art and fine art was referring to the painting, sculpture, drawing to some extent, photographic to some extent and print making and as a result every other art that is not that type of art would be referred to as craft and the Africans were always grouped together with oceanic and eastern countries as primitive people because our art sometimes was not meeting the specifics...
DR. MALKA	...so not using...
PROFESSOR MPAKO	...of the fine arts.
DR. MALKA	...the mediums that the fine arts had used..
PROFESSOR MPAKO	...so Judy Chicago was one of the first that I can remember because I studied her when I was doing my undergraduate in the 80's that tried to challenge the stereotype and change what was conceived as art and she made an installation or a triangular table in which she was honouring the important women in history so she was actually recording the history of the western women that were famous and even that art, even our days is still one of the art that is acknowledged. And then I'm thinking nowadays we've had Abo or Helen Sebidi who are South African artists and that would fall in that category of my age or a little bit older than me. But then we have the younger generation that have even pushed the stereotype even further, who comes to mind is Mary Sibande; the artwork of Sophie in which she is honouring the domestic workers and making reference to her own grandmother and females...
DR. MALKA	...is she the lady who utilises Victorian dress?
PROFESSOR MPAKO	...yes, yes, Sophie is the name of the artwork that she started with and then again you get Nandipha Mntambo. Nandipha Mntambo is also looking at the issues of identity and she's also challenging the stereotypes such as patriarchal belief systems as well, so there's quite a lot of them that we can think of but in the interests of time I will not mention all of them.
DR. MALKA	And how do you think...because they're bringing those issues to the fore and it's not in say a traditional format of black and white where we are reading it or we're listening to it on the airwaves or watching it on the TV screens, but how do you think that these works of art have helped influence attitudes and change stereotypes?
PROFESSOR MPAKO	I think they are, for example another artist now that comes to mind is Zanele Muholi who is actually addressing a current issue of a hate crime, the change where people in the township if they are gay and lesbians they are sometimes they are killed and we see these things happening nowadays. I do think that the attitudes of the society are changing and these young women, especially these young up and coming artists have been able to be bold enough, unlike us when we were younger artists and students we were not bold enough because we practiced during the apartheid regime, but these ones are very bold and it is really making significance because for example Zanele Muholi is really making a huge significance with her artwork.

DR. MALKA	And in that boldness female artists are obviously bringing forwards, not just issues that are confronting women that women are being challenged by but they're also providing a female perspective to those views; firstly do you think that we've got enough female artists to express and ensure that women's perspectives are being expressed and seen not just by women but also by men too?
PROFESSOR MPAKO	Ja, I think things are really changing especially when you look at the national competitions that you find in South Africa like Artilia, Sasol, Standard Bank; quite a few of them, the criteria for selecting best artist is not in favour of any gender, it's encompassing everybody and as a result in the last few....even this one for Sasol which I was a judge, it was a woman who actually won the first prize and guess what she used? She used this Shweshwe material to present an album of her family, which is again something very unconventional but it was found to be one of the best works and I think last year or the year before it was Nelmarie du Preez who is working with robots which is also something new, she creates these robots and then they work and do things and get tired and get anxious and get depressed....
DR. MALKA	...so human emotions....
PROFESSOR MPAKO	...exactly...
DR. MALKA	..that they experience...
PROFESSOR MPAKO	...so basically we've seen quite a few and I think South Africa is actually doing well when it comes to these competitions, there are quite a few of them and they open the avenue and they become a platform for almost everyone.
DR. MALKA	I think part of the challenge on recognition and elevating the arts is because often people don't really see the commercial viability of them and how that translates into creative industries that we need to almost increase, I mean the one that comes to mind is the likes of a Carrol Boyes with functional art as opposed to just the aesthetics; do you think that there's a balance of being able to just look at a piece and appreciate the piece for what it is or that we have to start trying to generate more commerciality?
PROFESSOR MPAKO	Well I suppose it's both yes and no. Yes in the sense that for artists who live they have to get some kind of income so that's where the entrepreneurship has to come in so that they are able to at least make money but at the same time we shouldn't be doing a quick-fix like I remember during the apartheid regime there was this kind of everybody wanted to depict riots and how apartheid regime was aggressive and unfair to black people and as a result the collectors....because the collectors they have a lot of influence because they would collect that because Ja, even if it's not really a genuine piece of work so they would collect it and then also influence now the people, not to actually develop even further, they would then just....
DR. MALKA	...just be trapped in a period...
PROFESSOR MPAKO	...yes trapped into this, like right now I just came back in July, I was at the University of Dar es Salaam and then I was looking at what the students there, I'm there externally, what the students there do, they are so stuck to what is called authentic art. Between me and you is there authentic art now? If we are looking at authentic art as in the definition that is the work that is done by people that did not have any education or did not have exposure to other genres or even other societies; is there anybody now in this day and era who does not know what is happening...

DR. MALKA	...I would hope not...
PROFESSOR MPAKO	...who does not know what is happening anywhere else, so ja, so also the collectors they did play a major influence, I think sometimes to even to the detriment to some of the artists that they would produce artwork to sell. There's nothing wrong with that but then the problem sometimes is that they don't aspire, or even if they do but they don't have the opportune....enough opportunity to develop themselves as artists in order to understand their language, the visual expression language.
DR. MALKA	And moving with the times, not being held back in the past.
PROFESSOR MPAKO	Yes, exactly.
DR. MALKA	Today we're talking to Professor Nombeko Mpako who is currently the Acting Director of the School of Arts at the University of South Africa and Chair of the Department of Art History, Visual Arts and Musicology.
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DR. MALKA	You are listening to "Womanity – Women in Unity" on Channel Africa, the African Perspective, also available on DSTV Channel 802. Today we're talking to Professor Nombeko Mpako who is currently the Acting Director of the School of Arts at the University of South Africa. We would love to receive your comments on Twitter: @WomanityTalk.
DR. MALKA	In the previous segment of our conversation we spoke about Professor Mpako's journey into the arts field; we also looked at some of the contributing factors and skills that arts bring from constructive thinking to imagination to creating good judgement, developing empathy skills, tolerance and opportunities to problem solve by considering multiple perspectives and ideas. We spoke about art as a format and it's different genres and we also looked at art as a compulsory subject into schools going through from pre-school to grade nine with a focus on four key streams; music, visual arts, dance and drama.
DR. MALKA	Prof Mpako this programme is all about gender equality and increasingly it has become a global focus and we often talk about the sustainable development goals, particularly number five for equality; how do you think the arts contributes to gender equality?
PROFESSOR MPAKO	I think once again what I have just said lastly that the South African national competitions which are art competitions, which are not barring anyone from participating, I think that to me is a platform that creates an opportunity for everyone and we have quite a few of those, right now as I speak with you we have the Johannesburg Art Fair that is showcasing artworks from different artists from South Africa, overseas and even in Africa and is supported or hosted by First National Bank.
DR. MALKA	So we're having a lot of sponsors....
PROFESSOR MPAKO	...yes...
DR. MALKA	...behind the arts to showcase them, to get these productions together and so in effect we need a lot of support from corporate South Africa...
PROFESSOR MPAKO	...and there's also....also a lot of now, lately an invitation for artists to go and do residences overseas....
DR. MALKA	...so we get the exposure....
PROFESSOR MPAKO	...everywhere, so there is a lot of exposure and I do think all those put together, they actually are changing the status quo....
DR. MALKA	And I think it's also about taking Africa into the rest of the world...
PROFESSOR MPAKO	...yes..

DR. MALKA	...and how that influences other artists, one that comes to mind Henri Matisse
PROFESSOR MPAKO	...oh yes...
DR. MALKA	...who was really influenced by African Art or I suppose as you said earlier it would probably better to reference it as African Craft, into his work; can you shed some light on the applications of the arts to maintain and nurture culture in society?
PROFESSOR MPAKO	What comes to mind is theNdebele Artist who is doing the Ndebele murals on the houses and which has now become actually a flagship of that part of South Africa and now what also you see, you see now people actually are simulating this Ndebele geometric shapes into a number of things just like thematerial of Ghana, and then again another one that comes to mind is what happening at Freedom Park for example, this.....area where it's a place where the heroes and heroines that were involved in the struggle have been...their ashes were fetched from wherever they died from and they were actually deposited at that place and this place it looks more like a shrine, in fact it is a shrine because you are not even supposed to go there with shoes and which is a form of respect because in African culture we respect our departed and we believe that we are not really separated from our departed, they are still alive and they still look after us, so that's another cultural symbol because it actually symbolises most African culture deal with death and ancestors.
DR. MALKA	Staying on the theme of African culture and our differences from the west, and I'm asking you to put on your educated cap; UNISA is an advocate of African scholarship and decolonising the curriculum, we know that the new Chancellor is the former president Thabo Mbeki, who is a proponent of African Renaissance, how do you see the responsibilities of universities towards shaping the thinking of students as the country and also the continents future socio-political, economic players and particularly women and also embracing our Africanness?
PROFESSOR MPAKO	Well UNISA currently as we speak, we are engaging or engaged already in a curriculum transformation, although we are not only transforming curriculum we are actually transforming the whole force of academia and the major aspect of this curriculum transformation is to recognise the Africanity and Africanness and we are not saying that we should disregard the western knowledge that we have learned but we are saying let's embrace our methodology of teaching, our ways of knowing, our epistemology so that we are able to expand our knowledge to the world at large. For example I'm also thinking now of Dennis Apo, the Nigerian theorist that is talking about post Africanism and then he defined post Africanism as the thought that embraces all and also that is not keeping our thinking and ideas within us, we expose or expand to the world so that the world can also learn from us so that the whole learning experience is not only one way, they also learn from us because Africa has a lot to offer, it's just that sometimes we always underestimate our own knowledge and our own ways of knowing because we think the west is smarter than us. So it is high time and this is what we are trying to do now at UNISA to make sure that we also embrace our own ways of knowing and thinking.
DR. MALKA	And are any other institutions as active in this transformation process as UNISA whether it's in South Africa or elsewhere in the continent?

PROFESSOR MPAKO	I know that when we were....somebody...one of the people that was a speaker in our council workshop or conference for transformation at UNISA mentioned something that TUT (Tshwane University of Technology) will also be having their conference soon, I'm not sure whether it's in September or in October but they are also because this is now like mandatory from the higher department of education so also it's also one of those things that we like now trying to as Africans trying to take control of our own education and our own knowledge and how we translate that knowledge into what we have learned from the west.
DR. MALKA	Thank you for sharing that insight, I look forward to seeing how those developments role out, I think it's an exciting space to be in. Whilst we're on the topic of transformation building female leadership I think is very important for the future of women in our country, in the continent and even the world, do you think that 50/50 representation across the board can be achieved?
PROFESSOR MPAKO	I suppose it can be achieved, once again we have policies but the problem again is how we enforce those policies so that they are implemented across but South Africa also has the EE, the Equity Plan, (National Equity Plan) which is enforced in all the private organisations, higher education institutions and everywhere that equity plan must be enforced, so I think if that process of enforcing the equity plan, national equity plan is adhered to by everyone we should be able to reach 50/50, but you know that Rome was never built in one day and there will always be all those resistances that will retard the progress.
DR. MALKA	Of course, everything takes work...
PROFESSOR MPAKO	...yes...
DR. MALKA	...and it needs the commitment and the effort and energy behind it. Now turning towards more of a personal perspective, one of the questions that I ask my guests on this programme who've made tremendous achievements in their respective disciplines is about some of the key factors to their success, so can you share with us some of the drivers to your success?
PROFESSOR MPAKO	I suppose my sister, Dr.was very instrumental because when I grew up as a child I was a sickling that my mother thought I was going to die; I wasn't going to reach the adulthood and as a result I pitied myself and I always lived in fear of dying and then when my son was born and I realised that ha I can't die anymore now because I've got this child, so all those moments put together they made me want to achieve so that I can provide a better life for my son which will be different from the life my parents provided for me; not because they didn't want to but that was what was available for them to, so basically it's also the way I grew up because my family thought I was going to die my mum instructed all my siblings to love me because I might not wake up the following day so I grew up being loved so much by everyone at home, even if I coughed, just a cough, everyone would jump and say are you okay, are you okay and then ja so that trust, being loved it actually made me who I am.
DR. MALKA	And it sounds like your sister was instrumental in your life....
PROFESSOR MPAKO	...yes...
DR. MALKA	...your mother was instrumental too...
PROFESSOR MPAKO	...and my father...

DR. MALKA	...any other strong women in your life who have helped form and forge the way you are?
PROFESSOR MPAKO	I think another strong woman was my core supervisor when I was studying in Australia, Dr. Penny McEwan who actually taught me that being an academic and teaching at university is not all about discipline, it's also about nurturing and caring about your students because they did. I remember my father died when I was in Australia, they bought me a ticket for me to come and they looked after my children, which was something over and above being my supervisors so Penny McEwan was one of the women that in my other life I felt was such an example and very influential and each and every time when I'm having students that have problems I mother them and as a result I have so many students that call me mum.
DR. MALKA	...extra children....
PROFESSOR MPAKO	...yes, I call them academic children....
DR. MALKA...	...I'm sure they're very honoured to have that and also to know that they can always count on you in moments of need. Now lastly as we close the show out today could you please share a few words of inspiration or words of encouragement that you'd like to impart to young women who are listening to us today?
PROFESSOR MPAKO	Ja well what I always say to my children, including my academic children, I always say that there is no such thing as quick-fix in life. In life you have to work hard, harder and harder and I always define the success and I will say success is when you set up your goal that you are going to do this or you are going to become the best artist or you are going to become the best educator and then after you've set up your goal, it's like when you are planning to go to Jo'burg, if you don't know how...you don't know how you're going to go to Jo'burg but you know you want to go to Jo'burg and if you don't know where you are going any route will take you anywhere so you've got to be specific by setting up your goals, thereafter spend the rest of your life towards achieving those goals because it gives you a moment for improvement every day because you are still alive. You can only stop improving your goals when you die because you can't do anything more so I always say you then after setting up your goals you spend the rest of your life towards achieving the goals until you die, it's not the sky is the limit, it's the grave is the limit. But also when you are setting up your goal you also want to know how do you want people to describe or know you as, and you keep that as your principles because that's what makes you who you are because whatever you do you always make a reference, even if when that constructive thinking is coming that says do this or steal or don't tell them that you have overpaid me, what if this comes out? If it comes out am I going to be proud of it? So basically that's what I always say to people.
DR. MALKA	So work hard, set your goals, aim to achieve them and....
PROFESSOR MPAKO	...even more...
DR. MALKA	...remember that you're going to be remembered for what you have achieved and what you have done in this life....
PROFESSOR MPAKO	...yes....
DR. MALKA	...so pay attention...
PROFESSOR	...yes...

MPAKO	
DR. M ALKA	Thank you so much for joining us today.
PROFESSOR MPAKO	Thank you.
	PROGRAMME END