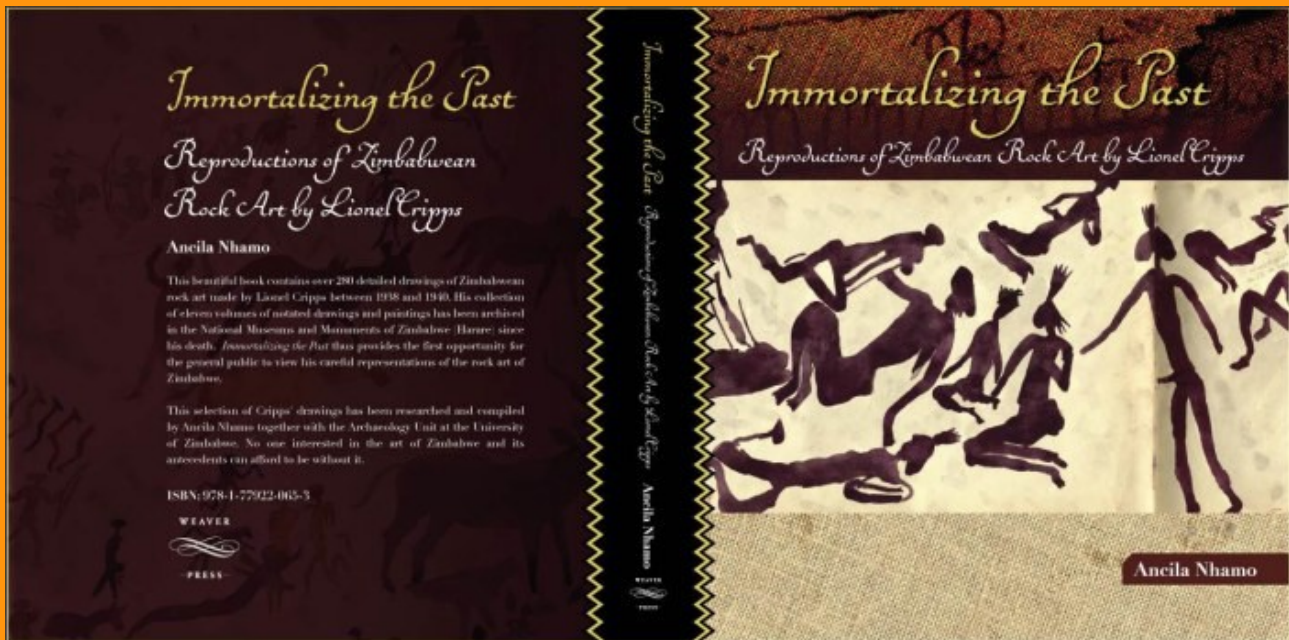


# IZIBONGO

Celebrating Art in Africa and the Diaspora

Issue 71 - 2018



## Ballad

## of

## Lionel Cripps

a review of

**Immortalizing the Past**

**Reproductions of Zimbabwean Rock Art by Lionel Cripps**

Natty Mark Samuels

# Editorial

Before I began this review, it was envisaged in the standard format of prose; but then the verses began to develop. Occasionally in life, we go with the flow: so it was with this review. I don't know if one has ever been written in verse before, but here we are! This is a piece of writing, at the intersection of tribute and review.

*Immortalizing the Past*, is a crucial publication, commending the campaign and artistry of an Unknown Hero. Has Zimbabwe honoured him? Have the English ethnographic societies celebrated him?

His watercolours present something mystical; there is instant engagement with the subject matter. Sad that the artwork cannot be exhibited: they would cause a worldwide sensation.

In this review, I am happy to present to you, LIONEL CRIPPS.

**Editor – Natty Mark Samuels – [africanschool.weebly.com](http://africanschool.weebly.com) – An African School Production**

**Cover photograph from *Weaver Press***

**Ballad of Lionel Cripps©Natty Mark Samuels, 2018**



**from *Weaver Press***

<https://reggaediscography.blogspot.co.uk/2018/01/izibongo-magazine-2018.html>

<http://rastaites.com/izibongo-issues-57-63/>

# Ballad of Lionel Cripps

dedicated to Irene Staunton, of Weaver Press

**Africa's rock art is the common heritage of all Africans, but it is more than that. It is the  
common heritage of humanity**  
Nelson Mandela

Finished reading a book today Lionel,  
Based upon your art.  
It's an invaluable source,  
As we compose pre-history's chart.

It tells of Zimbabwean rock art,  
One of the most bountiful in the world.  
Most of us will never see them,  
But through you they've been unfurled.

Born in India of English parentage,  
To Zimbabwe in 1950.  
Did you prefer the marula nut,  
Or what came from the fig tree?

After your time of tobacco,  
Came your epoch of watercolour.  
You painted what might be lost,  
The art of our ancestor.

Did you sit under the Musasa tree,  
Accepting the offer of shade?  
When the sun came conquering,  
On its daily blazing raid.

You copied what you saw,  
A record of ancient society.  
The to and fro of life,  
Of habit and necessity.

Sometimes in watercolour,  
Sometimes with just a pencil.  
Paintings of the secular,  
As well as of the spiritual.

Into the hills known as sacred,  
To Nswatugi and Bambata.  
You gave us the one called kudu,  
And the one entitled hunter.

Echo of the chant of the shaman,  
As he interacted with the spirits.  
You gave us their depiction,  
Of man in another orbit.

Into the Matopos,  
Where the Manyusa asked for rain.  
Did you see the barefoot man,  
Traversing the rocky plain?

I see you Lionel,  
Watching the black eagle soar.  
Mist over the mountain,  
Generates a feeling of awe.

Man painted his life,  
Multiple-thousands of years ago.  
You captured all you could,  
From Masvingo to Mutoko.

I learnt the word therianthrope,  
Figures both animal and human.  
You saw them here and there,  
In a variety of location.

Figures elongated,  
Maybe of shamanic trance.  
A trip into the next world,  
Where the mind begins to dance.

You went to Domboshava,  
As well as Marondera.  
The cave of Munemba,  
And the one there at Murewa.

Were you joyful at the lizards,  
Flitting here and there?  
The African Fish eagle,  
Floating through the air?

Sad to read of the graffiti,  
Gargantuan lack of respect.  
Something that stood for aeons,  
Gone down like those shipwrecked.

I see you on your mission,  
Stopping at Nyamauya.  
Marvelling again,  
That the painting brush was a feather.

You gave us giraffes and elephants,  
And of course the eland.  
You were a man on a mission,  
The original one-man band.

A man in his late seventies,  
Trodding the granite highway.  
Paintings were disappearing,  
No time for delay.

Did you smile at the hippos,  
Sunning by a pool?  
When tiredness overtook you,  
A boulder for a stool?

You saw antelope and man at Chisamba,  
'Crocodile Man at Glen View'.  
You went into the land of the Shona,  
And of the Ndebele too.

We are told that there were times,  
That you stuck sheets of paper together.  
To copy the larger scenario,  
Emblazoned on a rock shelter.

You painted the flora too,  
The shrubs as well as the trees.  
Gave us all you could,  
Thinking of posterity.

You went from site to site,  
Vignettes of the hunter-gatherer.  
Paintings from Dengeni,  
And those seen in Rumvanda.

The women of Mutoko,  
The storks at Manjowe.  
An Englishman left a gift,  
Of the aboriginal interplay.

Now I know of you Lionel,  
I shall not forget you.  
Sad to think we know of Rhodes,  
But of you we have no clue.

It was a blessed day,  
When this book came through my door.  
A great appendage,  
To my Zimbabwean knowledge store.

Eleven volumes of artwork,  
Documenting their lives.  
Held in the National Museums  
And Monuments archive.

I give thanks for Weaver Press,  
For giving us this treasure.  
For Ancila Nhamo also,  
The complier and narrator.

They should dedicate a plaque to you,  
There in the mountains called Vumba.  
The place that you called home,  
Which became your research centre.

Thank you for all you gave us,  
Your capturing of time.  
Thank you for the ancient verses,  
From your songbook called sublime.

Thank you the recording,  
The innumerable trips.  
I'm happy to sing the song,  
Called Ballad of Lionel Cripps.

**Natty Mark Samuels**



**from *Weaver Press***