

# IZIBONGO

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# Mama

# Nata

Natty Mark Samuels

# Editorial

When it comes to ceramics, I think of Baba Diakite, Mohammed Abdalla and the featured artist.

Here's an excerpt from a 2003 essay by **Stanley Hermans**...

*With dignity, humility and chic aplomb Nesta Nala, a timeless beauty, literally digs a living, and a life, out of the earth with her bare hands. With resilient and endless creativity she sculpts this clay into vessels of great beauty and exquisite form using only natural materials.*

One of the great carriers of the Zulu tradition of pottery, from South Africa, I am happy to present to you, NESTA NALA.

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

**Cover photo from *South African History Online*      Mama Nala©Natty Mark Samuels, 2017.**



from *Pinterest*

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

<http://rastaites.com/>



from *Pinterest*

# Mama Nala

dedicated to Elizabeth Perill, Clive Sithole and Helen Baillie of Sabali Pots

**Devotee:** Come let us talk of clay,  
Come let's speak of Nesta Nala.  
Wish I could have sat and watched,  
The Zulu Master Potter.

**Clay:** I am clay,  
So there is much of me.  
So take a piece,  
For the bride to be,  
Who needs a pot,  
To take the beer,  
To the house of her father-in law.

**Devotee:** Destined to interact with clay,  
Born in a place called Oyaya.  
Wish I could have sat and watched,  
The Zulu Master Potter.

**Voices (chanted):** Kneaded and pounded,  
Pounded and kneaded,  
Times of grog and fusion.  
Pounded and kneaded,  
Kneaded and pounded,  
The mud and woman cohesion.

**Clay:** I like the way she coils me:  
Like a serpent of construction,  
Raising a monument to culture.  
I go higher, higher,  
Wherever her hand leads me;  
Rounder, rounder,  
Wherever her mind needs me.  
If symbiosis had an epitome,  
I know it would be her and I.

**Devotee:** The conjurer of clay,  
Tutored by her mother.  
Wish I could have sat and watched,  
The Zulu Master Potter.

**Fire:** I am fire, so its time for my re-appearance, because the shallow pit is ready. So let me summon my accomplices...

**Cow Dung:** I am dung. But I too, am part of the Mama Nala master plan. I too, make my contribution to beauty.

**Aloe leaves:** I am aloe leaf. They collect me in bundles and lay the pots on me and cover them with me also.

**Tamboti:** I am a Tamboti tree. I give of my branches and my twigs.

**Euphorbia:** I am a Euphorbia tree. I give of my branches and my twigs.

**Grass:** I am grass, friend to the Zulu, happy to do my bit. I say friend, as they use my cousins and I, for their weaving and thatching, as well as the firing of pots.

**Fire:** Now we are all assembled, let the show begin.

**Cow Dung:** The firing is a mid-afternoon affair,

**Aloe leaves:** When it is not too windy.

**Tamboti:** Lasting about an hour,

**Euphorbia:** Till the pots turn orange in colour.

**Grass:** A second firing, changes the colour from orange to black

**Animal Fat:** I am animal fat. After the smoking to blacken the pot, I am the item of choice, to smooth and to polish: I am conclusion.

**Devotee:** Her love affair with clay,

From childhood days in Mamba.

Wish I could have sat and watched,

The Zulu Master Potter.

**Clay:** What she has learnt of me,  
She has passed to her daughters:

Bongi, Jabu,  
Thembi and Zanele.  
Carriers of tradition,  
Couriers of beauty.  
Of raised cords and incised lines  
Of impressions and amasumpa.  
Mama Nala watching,  
Must be smiling,  
Relaxing in her time of rest.

**Devotee:** The ancestors whispered clay,  
Something to hold utshwala.  
Wish I could have sat and watched,  
The Zulu Master Potter.

**Clay:** It felt good being in her hands.  
Excited by the development of the piece,  
As much as the finished product.  
Knowing that what she creates,  
May be placed in the imsamo:  
The sacred place in the Zulu home.  
Everyday mud,  
Embellished by human hand,  
Standing to attention in the darkened shrine.

**Devotee:** Like a Patron Saint of Clay,  
Earthen prayers to the Creator.  
Wish I could have sat and watched,  
The Zulu Master Potter.

**Man:** I know who to go to,  
When I need an imbiza;  
So sorghum and I,  
Can begin the diary,  
That you and I know as fermenting.

**Voices:** He is s going to see Mama Nala

**Woman:** I know who to go to,  
When I need umancishana;  
So chicken and I,  
Can commence that agenda,  
That you and I know as cooking.

**Voices:** She is going to see Mama Nala.

**Children's voices (chanted):** We love Grandma Nala,

Maker of umancishana,  
Holder of our amasi.  
We love Grandma Nala,  
Maker of umacishana,  
Holder of our amasi.

**Voices:** They are going to see Mama Nala!

**Devotee:** Her global exhibits in clay,  
Cultural Ambassador.  
Wish I could have sat and watched,  
The Zulu Master Potter.

**Clay:** Her and I won prizes,  
Sought after by collectors,  
Abroad as well as at home.  
So together we blessed,  
The river called Thukela,  
And all its tributaries.

So many blessings that river gave us,  
Too many to number and catalogue.

In tribute to its offerings,  
We made the best we could.  
We pounded and kneaded,  
Pressed and impressed:  
Template of her grandmother.  
Using the pot of our making,  
They gave thanks to the ancestors.

**Devotee:** She was devoted to clay,  
See the beautiful *ukhamba*.  
Wish I could have sat and watched,  
The Zulu Master Potter.





from *Ceramics Today*