



Izabel Mendes da  
Cunha

# Biography

Isabel Mendes da Cunha

1924, Itinga, Vale do Jequitinhonha, MG, Brazil - 2014, Itinga, Vale do Jequitinhonha, MG, Brazil

Her mother was a pot maker, her father was a farmhand, and her late husband a cowboy. Her early figures, also introduced by her into the region in the early 1970s, consisted of oxen, horsemen, birds on branches, small Nativity scenes, which were finished with tabatinga – a kind of white clay. She would also make more modern goods than the usual regional selection of earthenware: sets for bean dishes, ashtrays, and dinner sets. When she became a widow, she went to live with her children in Santana, where she then began in 1978 to create large-scale wedding couples, women breastfeeding, matrons and girls, which became known all over Brazil. To increase the size of her sculptures, she increased the size of her furnaces on her own and diversified the tones of clay used in the faces and clothes of the figures or “dolls”. At first the heads of these large figures were removable, an idea from her original concept of water jars. After a time, the heads joined the body and eventually became part of the sculptures, losing all utility traces and finally moving on to the urban standards of the aesthetic field. Isabel sells directly to buyers in the cities of Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte and São Paulo, and is the only artist in the entire Valley of Jequitinhonha, besides Ulisses Pereira Chaves, to achieve at least fair prices for her work. She gives extraordinary expression to the mestizo, white or black

faces of her women, always with great dignity and as if in deep thought. In the late 1990s, she told me that she makes figures of a “poor woman and a rich woman, since everyone is a child of God”. As frequently happens when a skilled master is found in the popular milieu, she would train disciples, at first those in her own home.

Her son-in-law, João Pereira de Andrade (1952), today with his own themes, creates more sensual half-naked women, as well as girls at windows, men, poor kids, pregnant mothers, and wedding couples. Isabel’s son Amadeu Mendes – who still work part-time as a peasant helped his mother in the initial preparation of the figures before he married Mercina, and is also a good animalist. Her daughters Maria Madalena and Glória are skilled in the technique of building a more secure figure, and her granddaughter Andréa Pereira de Andrade (1981) lends a lot of personality to the characters that she makes from clay and paints in sophisticated tones of gray, white and black, and earth colors. Also, from Isabel’s “school” we can mention Placedina Fernandes Nascimento, who died young, and who would give a remarkable shape to the slanting eyes and sometimes angular faces of her more dramatic breastfeeding mothers. Marina de Mello e Sousa (SAP, 59, 1995) says that Isabel shares her knowledge “with the pleasure of the genuine master” with anyone who visits her, and so “created around her a school of ceramists, involving every member of her family living in Santana and many other people from the place”. Izabel has participated in exhibitions in capitals in Southeast Brazil since the 1980s, and her work is found in the main museums of popular art in Brazil.

Source: Little Dictionary of the Brazilian People’s Art – 20th Century, by anthropologist and poet Lélia Coelho Frota



**Individual Exhibitions:**

2010 Isabel Mendes da Cunha | Ceramics, Station Gallery, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

**Collective Exhibitions:**

2023 "Reverses and Transverses": Artists Outside the Mainstream (and Friends) at the Biennials, galeria Estação, Sao Paulo – SP | Brazil

2021 2021 Terra/Terra – O Jequitinhonha e suas tradições, Museu do Pontal, Rio de Janeiro – RJ | Brazil

2021 The Citizens a look by Guillermo Kuitca of the collection, Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Milan, Italy

2020 Women in Folk Art, Galeria Estação, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

2020 Between Fragments and Cracks, Museu Janete Costa de Arte Popular, Niteroi, RJ, Brazil

2016 Between looks: poetics of Brazilian soul, Museu Afro Brasil, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

2012 - 2013 Janet Costa "A Look," Janet Coast Museum, Niteroi, RJ, Brazil

2012 Stories of Seeing - Show and Tell, Fondation Cartier, Paris, France

2012 Stubbornness of Imagination -Dec Brazilian artists, Imperial Palace Cultural Center, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil

2012 Stubbornness of Imagination -Dec Brazilian artists, Instituto Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

2012 Dona Izabel and other contemporaries, Galeria de Arte GTO do Sesc Palladium, Belo Horizonte, MG, Brazil

2010 Pure Blends, Pavilion of Brazilian Cultures, Pq. Ibirapuera, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

2007 The size of Brazil: Folk Art Shows, SESC Paulista, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

2006 Exhibition Santander, Santander Cultural Center, Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil

2006 Live Culture and Live Brazilian Artist, Museu Afro Brasil, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

2005 Year of Brazil in France, Carreau du Temple, the Marais - Paris, France

2004 Form, Color and Expression: a collection of Brazilian art, Station Gallery, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

2002 Pop Brazil: popular art and popular in art, Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil (CCBB São Paulo), São Paulo, SP, Brazil

2001 Popular Expression, Centro Cultural Light, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

2000 Rediscovery Exhibition - Brazil 500 years I Folk Art, Pavilhão da Bienal São Paulo, SP, Brazil

1995 The Heirs of the Night: fragments of the imaginary black: 300 years of Zumbi, Ministry of Culture, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

1995 Mestre Izabel and your school: ceramic at Vale do Jequitinhonha, Sala do Artista Popular, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil

### **Public Collections:**

Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

Museu de Arte Moderna MAM - Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil



Museu Afro Brasil, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

Fondation Cartier pour l'art Contemporain, Paris, France

Pavilhão das Culturas Brasileiras, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

**Selected Publications:**

2020 Women in Folk Art, Galeria Estação, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

2012 A Look Janet Costa, Janete Costa Museum, Niterói, RJ, Brazil

2012 Histoires de Voir - Show and Tell, Fondation Cartier, Paris, France

2012 Stubbornness of Imagination Ten Brazilian artists - IIPB, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

2010 Pavilion of Brazilian Cultures: Pure Blends, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

2010 Isabel Mendes da Cunha I Ceramics, Galeria Estação, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

2007 Live Culture of the Brazilian people, Museu Afro Brasil, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

2005 Little Book of the Art of the Brazilian People: the twentieth century, Publisher Airship, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil

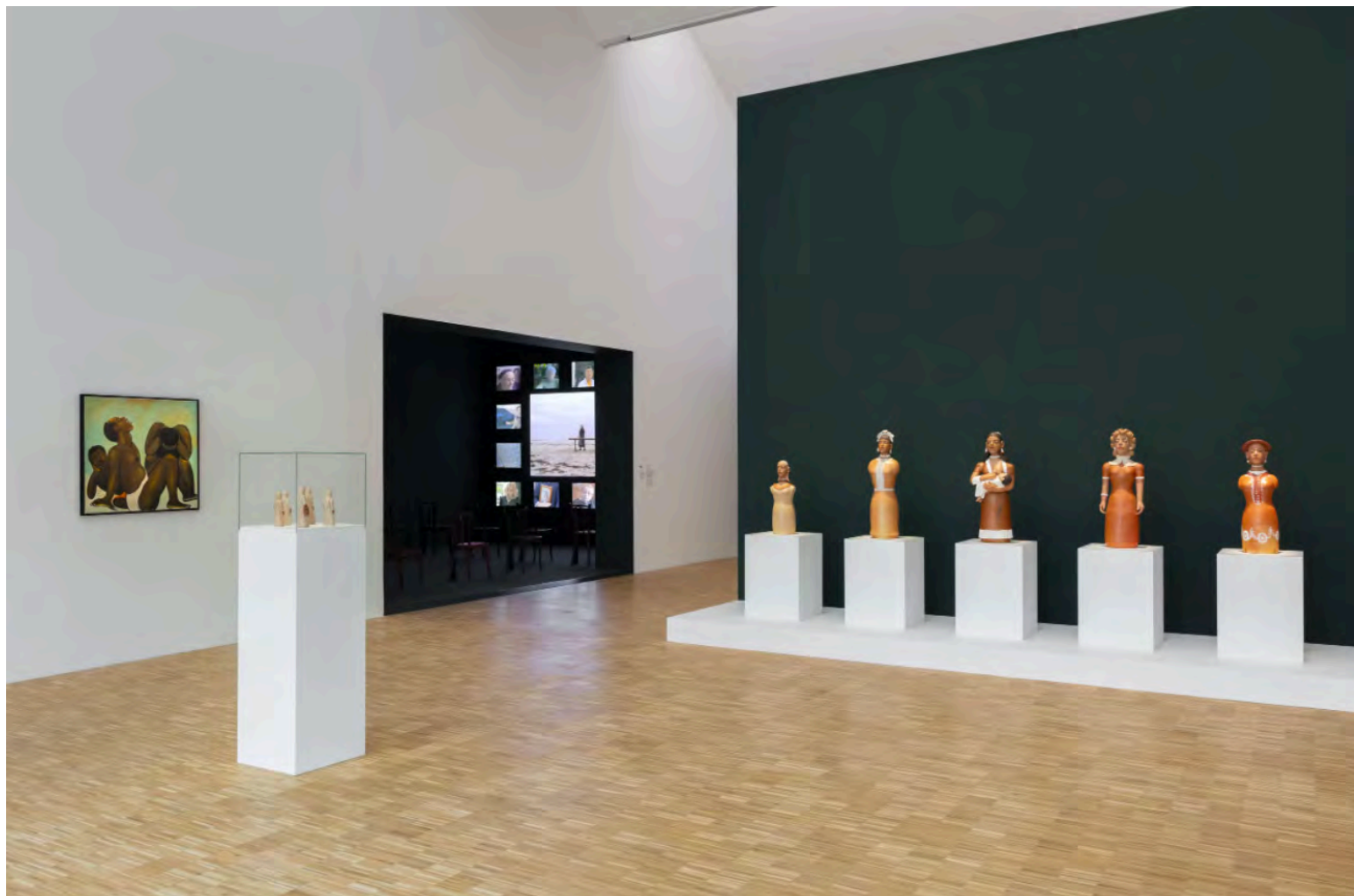
2005 POP Brazil: The Folk Art and Popular Art in 2002, Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

2000 Shows the Rediscovery - Brazil 500 years I Folk Art, Takano Publisher, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

2000 The Heirs of the Night: fragments of the imaginary black: 300 years of Zumbi, Ministry of Culture, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

1992 Live the Brazilian People: crafts and folk art, Publisher New Frontiers, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil

## Exhibitions

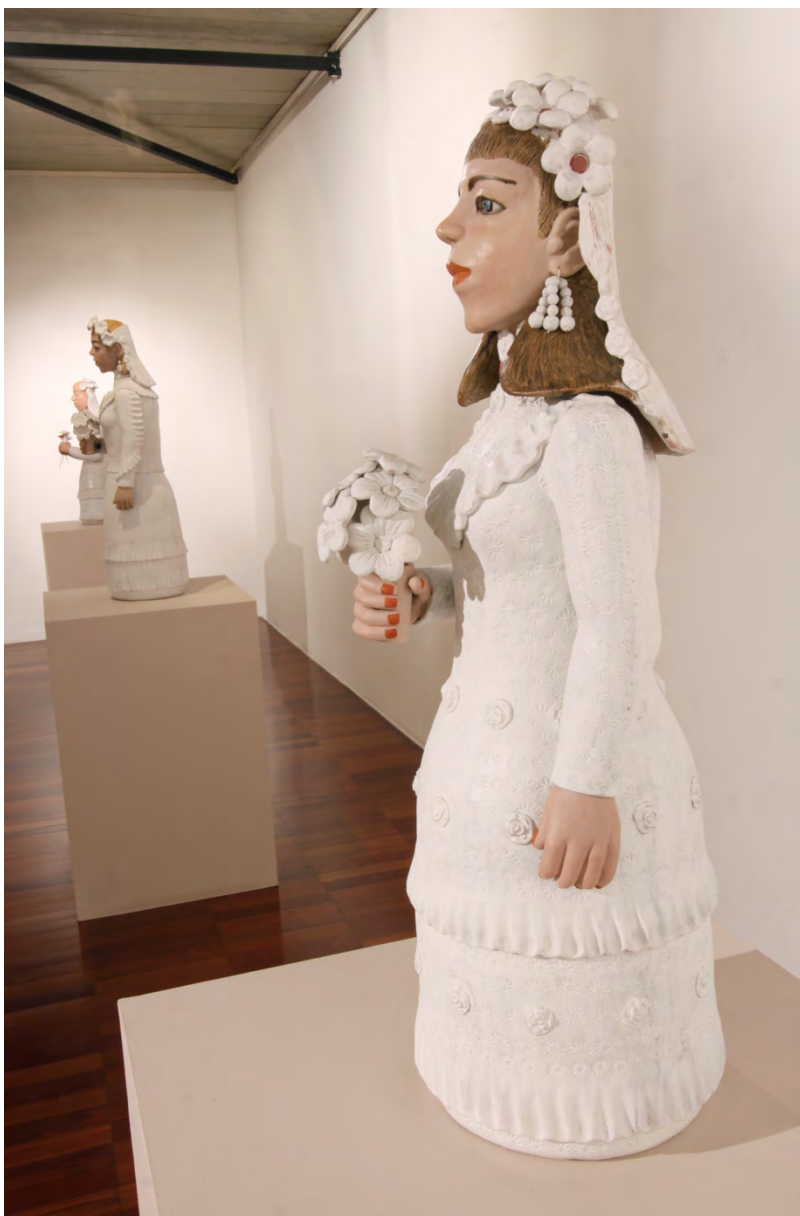




2021 The Citizens a look by Guillermo Kuitca of the collection,  
Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Milan, Italy



2010 Isabel Mendes da Cunha | Ceramics, Galeria Estação, São Paulo, SP, Brazil









2020 Women in Folk Art, Galeria Estação, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

# Artworks



Untitled, 70's  
Polychrome ceramic  
75 x 24 x 24 cm | 29.52 x 9.44 x 9.44 in





Untitled, 70's  
Polychrome ceramic  
69 x 29 x 24 cm | 27.16 x 11.41 x 9.44 in

With a collection among the most important of the country, Galeria Estação, inaugurated at the end of 2004, devoted itself to revealing and promoting the production of Brazilian non-scholar art. The gallery was responsible for including this language in the contemporary art scene, while editing publications and holding individual and collective exhibitions inside and outside the country.

Galeria Estação works with well-known self-taught artists from various regions of Brazil, such as Agostinho Batista de Freitas, Alcides dos Santos, Amadeo Luciano Lorenzato, Artur Pereira, Aurelino dos Santos, Chico Tabibuia, Cícero Alves dos Santos-Véio, GTO, Gilvan Samico, Itamar Julião, João Cosmo Felix-Nino, José Antônio da Silva, José Bezerra, Manuel Graciano, Maria Auxiliadora, Mirian Inês da Silva, Neves Torres, among others.

Currently the gallery has been incorporating to its cast artists belonging to the contemporary artistic circuit whose works interact with non-scholar creation, such as André Ricardo, José Bernnô, Julio Villani, Germana Monte-Mór, Moisés Patrício e Santídio Pereira.

Starting from this rare competence, the space is able to offer a historical and current panorama of a production that went beyond the limits of self-thought art, at the same time as it investigates names that, independently of the formation, work with elements from the same source.

Galeria Estação

Rua Ferreira de Araújo, 625 – Pinheiros, São Paulo, SP, Brazil – phone: (+5511) 3813-7253

From Monday to Friday, from 11am to 7pm, Saturday from 11am to 3pm

[www.galeriaestacao.com.br](http://www.galeriaestacao.com.br)

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