



# Isabel Mendes da Cunha

ARTIST'S PORTFOLIO



## BIOGRAPHY

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”.

### Isabel Mendes da Cunha

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

## BIOGRAPHY

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". Isabel 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.

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

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



## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2010

Isabel Mendes da Cunha

Ceramics, Station Gallery, São Paulo - SP, Brazil





## COLLECTIVE EXHIBITIONS

- 2025** Exposition Générale  
Place du Palais Royal, Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris, França
- 2025** In every corner: Casa Fiat de Cultura and Instituto Tomie Ohtake visit  
Vilma Eid Collection  
Casa Fiat de Cultura, Belo Horizonte - MG, Brazil
- 2025** Instituto Tomie Ohtake visits Vilma Eid Collection – In Every corner  
Instituto Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo – SP, Brazil
- 2024** Cotidiano, imaginação e paisagem: Galeria Estação, 20 anos  
Galeria Estação, São Paulo - SP, Brazil
- 2023** "Reverses and Transverses": Artists Outside the Mainstream (and Friends) at the  
Biennials  
Galeria Estação, São Paulo - SP, Brazil
- 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



## COLLECTIVE EXHIBITIONS

- |             |  |
|-------------|--|
| 2020        | Between Fragments and Cracks<br>Museu Janete Costa de Arte Popular, Niteroi - RJ, Brazil                           |
| 2016        | Between looks: poetics of Brazilian soul<br>Museu Afro Brasil, São Paulo - SP, Brazil                              |
| 2012 - 2013 | Janet Costa "The Gaze"<br>Janet Coast Museum, Niteroi - RJ, Brazil   |
| 2012        | Stories of Seeing - Show and Tell<br>Fondation Cartier, Paris, France  |
| 2012        | Stubbornness of Imagination -Dec Brazilian artists<br>Imperial Palace Cultural Center, Rio de Janeiro - RJ, Brazil |
| 2012        | Stubbornness of Imagination -Dec Brazilian artists<br>Instituto Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo - SP, Brazil               |
| 2012        | Dona Izabel and other contemporaries<br>Galeria de Arte GTO do Sesc Palladium, Belo Horizonte - MG, Brazil         |
| 2010        | Pure Blends<br>Pavilion of Brazilian Cultures, Pq. Ibirapuera, São Paulo - SP, Brazil                              |

## COLLECTIVE EXHIBITIONS

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 2007 | <b>The size of Brazil: Folk Art Shows</b><br>Sesc Paulista, São Paulo - SP, Brazil                                  |
| 2006 | <b>Exhibition Santander</b><br>Santander Cultural Center, Porto Alegre - RS, Brazil                                 |
| 2006 | <b>Live Culture and Live Brazilian Artist</b><br>Museu Afro Brasil, São Paulo - SP, Brazil                          |
| 2005 | <b>Year of Brazil in France</b><br>Carreau du Temple, the Marais, Paris, France                                     |
| 2004 | <b>Form, Color and Expression: a collection of Brazilian art</b><br>Station Gallery, São Paulo - SP, Brazil         |
| 2002 | <b>Pop Brazil: popular art and popular in art</b><br>CCBB - Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, São Paulo - SP, Brazil |
| 2001 | <b>Popular Expression</b><br>Centro Cultural Light, São Paulo - SP, Brazil  |
| 2000 | <b>Rediscovery Exhibition - Brazil 500 years</b><br>Folk Art, Pavilhão da Bienal São Paulo - SP, Brazil             |

## COLLECTIVE EXHIBITIONS

1995

The Heirs of the Night: fragments of the imaginary black: 300 years of Zumbi  
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

MAM RJ - Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro

Rio de Janeiro - RJ, Brazil

Museu Casa do Pontal

Rio de Janeiro - RJ, Brazil

Museu Afro Brasil Emanuel Araújo

São Paulo - SP, Brazil

Fondation Cartier pour l'art Contemporain

Paris, France

Pavilhão das Culturas Brasileiras

São Paulo - SP, Brazil



Documentary - Izabel Cunha

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## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 2025 | In every corner: Casa Fiat de Cultura and Instituto Tomie Ohtake visit Vilma Eid Collection<br>Casa Fiat de Cultura, Belo Horizonte - MG, Brazil       |
| 2024 | Moderno Contemporâneo Popular Brasileiro   The Vilma Eid Gaze<br>Daniel Rangel, Germana Monte-Mór e Lorenzo Mammi, Editora WMF, São Paulo – SP, Brazil |
| 2024 | Metamorfoses e Distâncias<br>Galeria Estação, São Paulo – SP, Brazil   |
| 2023 | Cotidiano, Imaginação e Paisagem: Galeria Estação, SP<br>Instituto Çare, São Paulo – SP, Brazil  |
| 2023 | Reversos e Transversos<br>Galeria Estação, São Paulo – SP, Brazil  |



## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 2020 | Women in Folk Art<br>Galeria Estação, São Paulo – SP, Brazil  |
| 2012 | A Look Janet Costa<br>Janete Costa Museum, Niterói - RJ, Brazil   |
| 2012 | Histoires de Voir - Show and Tell<br>Fondation Cartier, Paris, France   |
| 2012 | Stubbornness of Imagination Ten Brazilian artists<br>IIPB, São Paulo - SP, Brazil                                       |
| 2010 | Pavilion of Brazilian Cultures: Pure Blends<br>São Paulo - SP, Brazil   |
| 2010 | Isabel Mendes da Cunha   Ceramics<br>Galeria Estação, São Paulo - SP, Brazil  |
| 2007 | Live Culture of the Brazilian people<br>Museu Afro Brasil, São Paulo - SP, Brazil                                       |
| 2005 | Little Book of the Art of the Brazilian People: the twentieth century<br>Publisher Airship, Rio de Janeiro - RJ, Brazil |

## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 2005 | POP Brazil: The Folk Art and Popular Art in 2002<br>Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, São Paulo - SP, Brazil                               |
| 2000 | Shows the Rediscovery - Brazil 500 years  Folk Art<br>Takano Publisher, São Paulo - SP, Brazil  |
| 1995 | The Heirs of the Night: fragments of the imaginary black: 300 years of Zumbi<br>Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo - SP, Brazil |
| 1992 | Live the Brazilian People: crafts and folk art<br>Publisher New Frontiers, Rio de Janeiro - RJ, Brazil                                    |



EXHIBITIONS



2009 - 2010

## Izabel Mendes da Cunha

Cerâmicas, Galeria Estação, São Paulo - SP, Brazil



2009 - 2010

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ARTWORK



**Izabel Mendes da Cunha**  
**1924 - 2014, Itinga, Vale do Jequitinhonha - MG, Brazil**

Untitled, Déc 80 | 80's  
Polychrome ceramic  
73 x 26 x 41 cm | 28.74 x 10.23 x 16.14 in  
Photo credit: ©João Liberato





THE GALLERY

**Established in 2004 in São Paulo, Brazil, Galeria Estação inaugurated a curatorial program serving a wide-reaching community of noncanonical artistic voices. By creating trans-generational bridges between emerging contemporary and pioneering self-taught artists, Galeria Estação has inspired an integrative network of creative figures and makers from varied geographies and educational backgrounds.**

Since 2008, the gallery's innovative artistic program, housed in a state-of-the-art architectural building, has exhibited contemporary Brazilian artists whose cultural backgrounds and vernacular practices complement the primacy of self-taught art —examining the country's under represented artistic styles, working methods, and historical narratives and legacies.

Galeria Estação's artistic director and founder, Vilma Eid, in collaboration with a distinguished group of invited guest curators, have proposed unexpected dialogues in presentations that have transcended

traditional accounts of the development of abstract and figural genres in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, initiating the past and present of Brazilian art.

As a result, Galeria Estação is an institutional reference in Brazil, a force for preserving Latin American memories and narratives otherwise dismissed, marginalized, or overlooked in the historiographies of Brazilian art.

Galeria Estação advances its mission to provide unprecedented opportunities for viewers to experience expansive local and global visions of Brazilian art.

Galeria Estação exhibits a large stable of self-taught artists: Agnaldo dos Santos, Agostinho Batista de Freitas, Amadeo Luciano LORENZATO, Artur Pereira, Chico da Silva, Chico Tabibuia, Conceição dos Bugres, Elza O.S, Geraldo Teles Oliveira – G.T.O, Gilvan SAMICO, Itamar Julião, Izabel Mendes da Cunha, José Antonio da Silva, Madalena dos Santos Reinbolt, Maria Auxiliadora, Mirian Inêz da Silva, Sebastião Theodoro Paulino da Silva – RANCHINHO, Suanê e Zica Bergami.

The growing roster of contemporary artists include: Deni Lantz, Eduardo Ver, Higo José, José Bezerra, Julio Vilani, Rafael Pereira, Santídio Pereira, Cicero Alves dos Santos - Véio.

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