The Earth Shaped by Art

Jequitinhonha Valley

VALLEY COLLECTIVE

Adriana Xavier, Alice Ribeiro, Ana Ribeiro, Anisia Lima, Andréia Andrade, Augustto Ribeiro, Conceição, Durvalina Gomes, Glória Maria Andrade, Irene Gomes da Silva, Maria Pereira, Mariete Santana, Rita Ferreira, Salvina Gomes, Terezinha Barbosa, Valdete Fernandes, Vera Lopes.

Organization

Ricardo Fernandes Gallery

Curatorship and Scenography

Ricardo Chaves Fernandes

Venue

Ricardo Fernandes Gallery
5 rue Bailly
75003 Paris
France

Period

September 8 to 18, 2026

Initiative

Government of the State of Minas Gerais
Sebrae MG, Brazil

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

The Government of the State of Minas Gerais, Brazil, and Sebrae MG — the Brazilian Service for Support of Micro and Small Enterprises of Minas Gerais — are the great driving forces behind this exhibition. For more than two decades, Sebrae MG has accompanied and strengthened the Jequitinhonha Valley Collective through actions of training, productive organization, market access, and enhancement of the territory's cultural identity. The development of craft and art in the region has resulted in greater professionalization of the activity, increased income, and, consequently, in the recognition by new generations of the sector's transformative potential.

The exhibition "The Earth Shaped by Art" presents the result of this work, highlighting the artistic and cultural potential of the Jequitinhonha Valley region and its existing collective of artists.

It is within the scope of this long-term project that the Ricardo Fernandes Gallery presents, for the first time in a solo international exhibition, the work of the Valley Collective: a group of ceramists whose production represents one of the most vibrant and coherent continuities of the artistic tradition, having as one of its principal founders Master Izabel Mendes da Cunha (1924-2014).

The exhibition brings together hand-modeled ceramic sculptures by the collective's members, which articulate memory, territory, femininity, and ancestry.

Each work is a gesture of permanence: the silent affirmation that a culture persists, transmits itself, and reinvents itself.

EXHIBITION OBJECTIVES

To crown years of work by the Government of the State of Minas Gerais and Sebrae MG — the Brazilian Service for Support of Micro and Small Enterprises of Minas Gerais — alongside the Valley Collective with its first international presentation in Paris.

To project the art of Minas Gerais onto the European cultural circuit as a model for the enhancement of Brazilian artistic territories.

To present for the first time in Paris, and outside Brazil, the work of the Jequitinhonha Valley Collective in a well-focused group exhibition, positioning the ceramics of the Jequitinhonha Valley as a contemporary artistic language on the European cultural circuit.

To recognize the School of Izabel Mendes da Cunha — one of the leading artists who spread the work of the region's artisans nationally and internationally — as the aesthetic matrix of a living and expanding tradition.

To strengthen the link between creative economy, territorial identity, and cultural exportation.

To affirm the role of the gallery as a space of revelation, transmission, and cultural responsibility.

CONCEPT

The Jequitinhonha Valley, in the northeast of Minas Gerais, is one of the most important creative territories in Brazil. Even before being recognized as a craft hub, it was already a place of expanding knowledge: the women of the region shaped clay with their hands, passing down from generation to generation a technique that served daily life and, at the same time, transcended it.

The Valley Collective is the contemporary expression of this legacy. Adriana Xavier, Alice Ribeiro, Ana Ribeiro, Anisia Lima, Andréia Andrade, Augustto Ribeiro, Conceição, Durvalina Gomes, Glória Maria Andrade, Irene Gomes da Silva, Maria Pereira, Mariete Santana, Rita Ferreira, Salvina Gomes, Terezinha Barbosa, Valdete Fernandes, and Vera Lopes are ceramists who carry in the clay the memory of a territory. Their pieces do not repeat: they continue. Each doll, each figure, each surface smoothed and painted with natural engobes is an act of creation born from tradition and surpassing it.

The exhibition The Earth Shaped By Art invites the European public to discover not only objects of singular beauty, but a silent pedagogy about deep Brazil: about ancestry, the time of clay, the strength of the women of the sertão, and the intelligence of a community that transformed scarcity into cultural power.

MASTER IZABEL MENDES DA CUNHA

It was in this territory that Master Izabel Mendes da Cunha developed what we now recognize as the School of the Jequitinhonha Valley. She not only created her own visual vocabulary, with her large doll-jugs, feminine figures of sculptural and proud presence, but also trained, in her domestic workshop, generations of ceramists who learned by watching her work.

CURATORIAL APPROACH

The exhibition starts from a fundamental principle: exporting culture means shifting perceptions. Each piece sent to Paris carries a pedagogy about Brazil that goes beyond the formal beauty of the object.

The selection of works favors expressive diversity within the aesthetic unity of the Jequitinhonha Valley Collective: feminine figures, maternities, brides, large-scale sculptures, representations of daily life in the sertão. The earthy palette, the eyes modeled separately and applied to the face, the proud posture of the figures, the meticulous attention to adornments — all of this composes an immediately recognizable language, which at the same time allows each ceramist to express their singular voice.

The scenography favors the breathing space between the pieces, the individual reading of each sculpture, and the security necessary for the three-dimensional character of the production. The space becomes a territory: the visitor not only sees the pieces but comes into contact with the universe that generated them.

Presenting this collective in Paris is part of a nearly 20-year trajectory of the gallery's presence in the European market.

Since its founding in 2007, the Ricardo Fernandes Gallery has been a space of inaugural recognition for Brazilian artists: Amilcar de Castro, Glicéria Tupinambá, Antonio Peticov, José Diniz, and many others were presented in Paris and Saint-Ouen for the first time in a singular manner. It is this history of risk-taking, of betting on Brazilian art, and of building cultural bridges that gives the Valley Collective exhibition its natural place: not as a curiosity, but as recognized artistic power.

CURATORIAL TEXT

Clay expresses the essence.

It holds the impression of the fingers that touch it, the patience of those who know how to wait for the beauty of the gesture, eternalized in matter. Clay is foundation and memory: it is with clay that the women of the Jequitinhonha Valley region, in the State of Minas Gerais, Brazil, wrote a history worthy of the finest history books on the planet.

It all began with the artisan women of the Jequitinhonha Valley who, understanding the message of clay in an ancestral and organic way, made water jugs to sell and to fight for the survival of their families.
With a natural aesthetic sense, the artisan women began to create doll-jugs, transforming the utilitarian gesture into an artistic gesture, playfully modifying an everyday object into a sculpture of absolutely feminine presence. One of the leading precursors of this movement was Master Izabel Mendes da Cunha (1924-2014), from the region of Santana do Araçuaí. Organically, her house became her studio, and her studio gave rise to a true school of creative thought. Not the school of written, academic rules, but of the wisely natural teachings of her imagination, rigor, and generosity, which became a unique learning experience grounded in life stories.

The Valley Collective, presented in this exhibition, is a living fragment of this transmission of knowledge to the women and men of the region: Adriana Xavier, Alice Ribeiro, Ana Ribeiro, Anisia Lima, Andréia Andrade, Augustto Ribeiro, Conceição, Durvalina Gomes, Glória Maria Andrade, Irene Gomes da Silva, Maria Pereira, Mariete Santana, Rita Ferreira, Salvina Gomes, Terezinha Barbosa, Valdete Fernandes, and Vera Lopes are contemporary ceramic artists, presented in our exhibition, guardians of a language that crosses generations and arrives in Paris for the first time in an exhibition dedicated to telling this saga.

Each piece presented here carries the territory that shaped it: the dry, weathered earth, the mineral palette, the heat of the kiln, the silent dignity of the feminine figures, and the strength of a community that knew how to transform scarcity into sculptural beauty, once initiated by survival and now devoted to the poietics of life.

When we observe a sculpture from the Jequitinhonha Valley - works of these new artists - we recognize more than technical skills, we perceive the presence of the master who remains as matrix and foundation, yet in collective authorship that is preserved through education. The territory, a transmitter of knowledge and tradition of the earth, becomes today living art in the hands of each one.

And the exhibition The Earth Shaped By Art is an invitation to stop time, to listen to what the earth says, through the shaping hands of these artists, who from the heart of Brazil, now guide us toward the discovery of a new world.

Ricardo Chaves Fernandes, 2026

THE VALLEY COLLECTIVE

The Valley Collective brings together contemporary ceramists from the Jequitinhonha Valley, in Minas Gerais, whose production is part of the aesthetic lineage promoted by Master Izabel Mendes da Cunha and so many other women. Formed within the framework of the craft and creative economy support program led by SEBRAE MG, the collective represents generations of ceramists from the region who preserve and reinvent the techniques, symbols, and sensibility that defined Jequitinhonha ceramics as one of the most singular expressions of Brazilian popular art.

The exhibition The Earth Shaped By Art marks the collective's first presentation outside Brazil.

THE SCHOOL OF THE JEQUITINHONHA VALLEY

In the field of art, the term school designates not a formal institution, but an aesthetic lineage: a set of practices, techniques, sensibilities, and ways of making transmitted between generations. In this sense, the production of Izabel Mendes da Cunha (1924-2014) founds what we can call the School of the Jequitinhonha Valley.

Born in Itinga, Minas Gerais, Izabel learned from her mother to work with clay and, over decades, developed an unmistakable visual vocabulary: eyes modeled separately and applied to the face, arms built with precision, surfaces smoothed and painted with natural engobes, feminine figures of sculptural and proud presence that evoke maternity, rituals, and the silent strength of the women of the Sertão.

Her work was recognized with the UNESCO Crafts Prize for Latin America and the Caribbean (2004), the Order of Cultural Merit from the Ministry of Culture (2005), and the Popular Cultures Prize (2009). Her pieces are part of public and private collections in Brazil and abroad, including the Contemporary Art Collection of the Fondation Cartier, in Paris.

Izabel's influence is direct and unavoidable in the work of each ceramist of the Valley Collective.

The way of modeling, the earthy palette, the construction of the figures, the way of firing and preparing the clay: all of this was transmitted between generations who learned by watching the master work. Her school continues to expand, reaffirming that tradition, when alive, is not repetition, but creative continuity.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Title	The Earth Shaped By Art — Jequitinhonha Valley
Collective	Adriana Xavier, Alice Ribeiro, Ana Ribeiro, Anisia Lima, Andréia Andrade, Augustto Ribeiro, Conceição, Durvalina Gomes, Glória Maria Andrade, Irene Gomes da Silva, Maria Pereira, Mariete Santana, Rita Ferreira, Salvina Gomes, Terezinha Barbosa, Valdete Fernandes, Vera Lopes
Curatorship and Scenography	Ricardo Fernandes
Type	Group exhibition
Press opening	September 8, 2026, 4:00 PM to 6:00 PM
VIP opening	September 8, 2026, 5:00 PM to 9:00 PM
General opening	September 9, 2026, 5:00 PM to 9:00 PM
Exhibition period	September 8 to 18, 2026
Venue	5 rue Bailly, 75003 Paris, France
Contact	projects@ricardofernandes.biz
Phone / WhatsApp	+33 6 81 35 12 87
Website	www.ricardofernandes.biz
Initiative	Government of the State of Minas Gerais / SEBRAE MG, Brazil

TARGET AUDIENCE

Enthusiasts of contemporary art and craft cultures.

Collectors and professionals in the art world.

Researchers in anthropology, art history, and postcolonial studies.

Cultural and museum institutions.

Brazilian and Latin American diasporas in Paris.

Students of art, design, sociology, and ethnology.

COMMUNICATION AND MEDIATION

The exhibition will be accompanied by:

Press dossier distributed to cultural and art media in Paris and Brazil.

Presentation brochure available on site.

Publications on the gallery's social media.

Guided tours.

Local, national, and international press coverage through the press dossier.

INITIATIVE

Initiative of the State of Minas Gerais and Sebrae MG — the Brazilian Service for Support of Micro and Small Enterprises of Minas Gerais. For years, Sebrae MG has developed a program to support crafts and the creative economy of the Jequitinhonha Valley, working directly with the Valley Collective to strengthen the ceramists of the region: training, productive organization, market access, and enhancement of the territory's cultural identity.

The exhibition The Earth Shaped By Art — Jequitinhonha Valley represents the international crowning of this journey, bringing the collective's work to Paris and the European cultural circuit for the first time.

IMAGES — NOTE TO EDITORS

Images from the exhibition The Earth Shaped By Art — Jequitinhonha Valley are available upon request. Please send your request directly to the gallery:

Email: projects@ricardofernandes.biz

Phone / WhatsApp: +33 6 81 35 12 87

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We express our deep gratitude to the Government of the State of Minas Gerais, as well as to SEBRAE MG for the initiative and lasting partnership with the Jequitinhonha Valley Collective. We thank each ceramist of the collective, whose dedication and generosity made this exhibition possible. We also thank the technical teams, institutional supporters, and all those who, near or far, contributed to bringing the art of the Valley to Paris and from here to the world.

RICARDO FERNANDES GALLERY

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