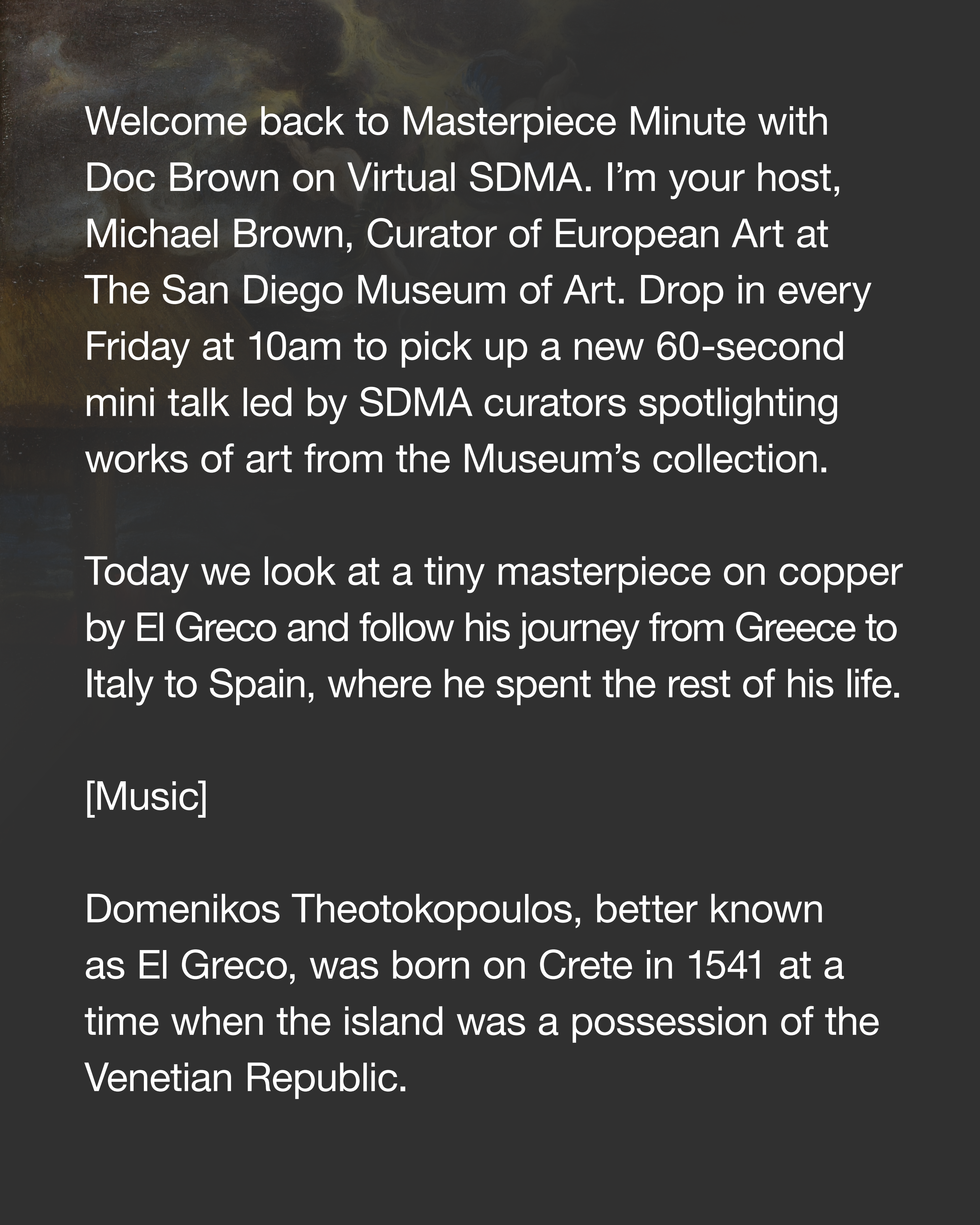


MASTERPIECE MINUTE



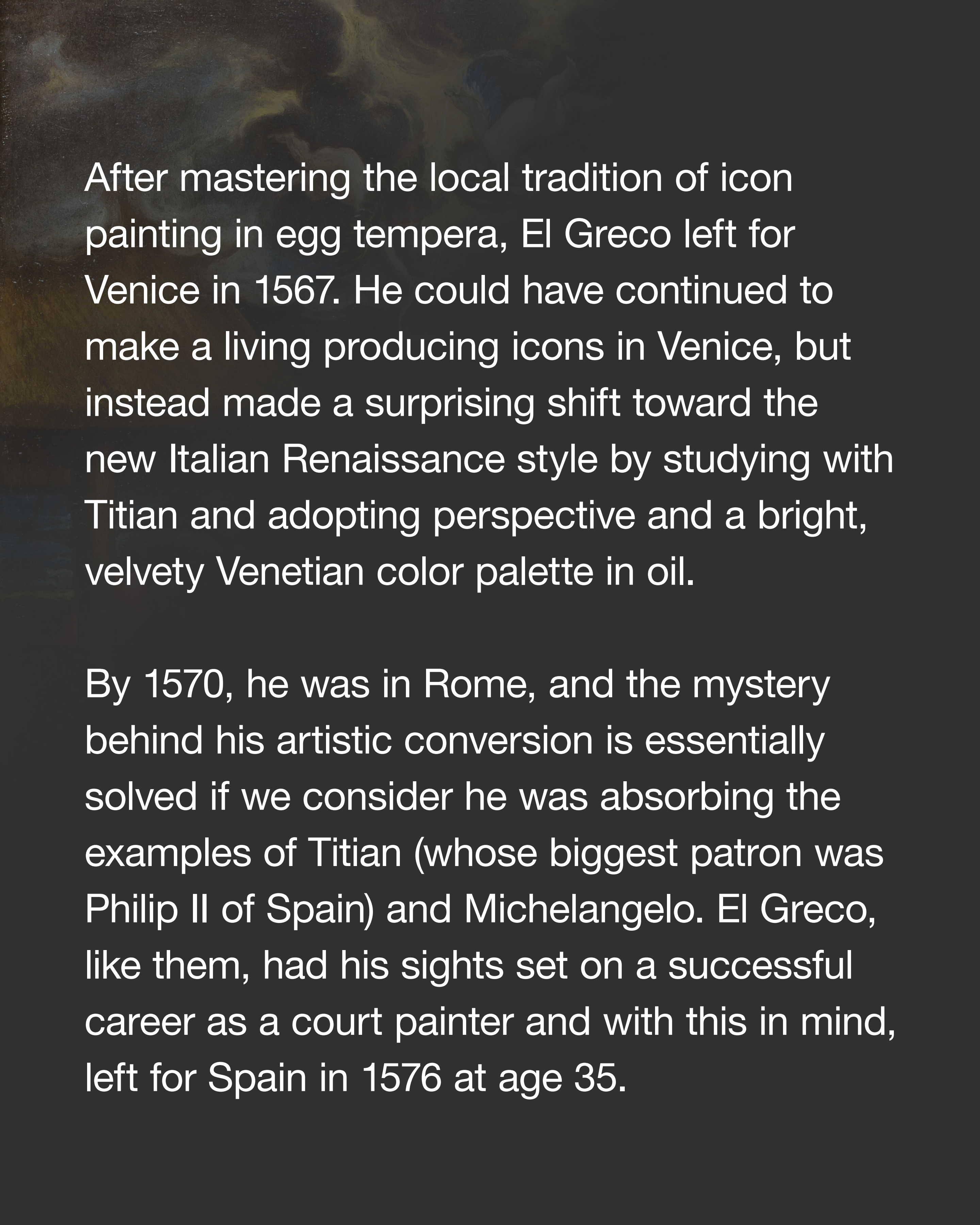


Welcome back to Masterpiece Minute with Doc Brown on Virtual SDMA. I'm your host, Michael Brown, Curator of European Art at The San Diego Museum of Art. Drop in every Friday at 10am to pick up a new 60-second mini talk led by SDMA curators spotlighting works of art from the Museum's collection.

Today we look at a tiny masterpiece on copper by El Greco and follow his journey from Greece to Italy to Spain, where he spent the rest of his life.

[Music]

Domenikos Theotokopoulos, better known as El Greco, was born on Crete in 1541 at a time when the island was a possession of the Venetian Republic.



After mastering the local tradition of icon painting in egg tempera, El Greco left for Venice in 1567. He could have continued to make a living producing icons in Venice, but instead made a surprising shift toward the new Italian Renaissance style by studying with Titian and adopting perspective and a bright, velvety Venetian color palette in oil.

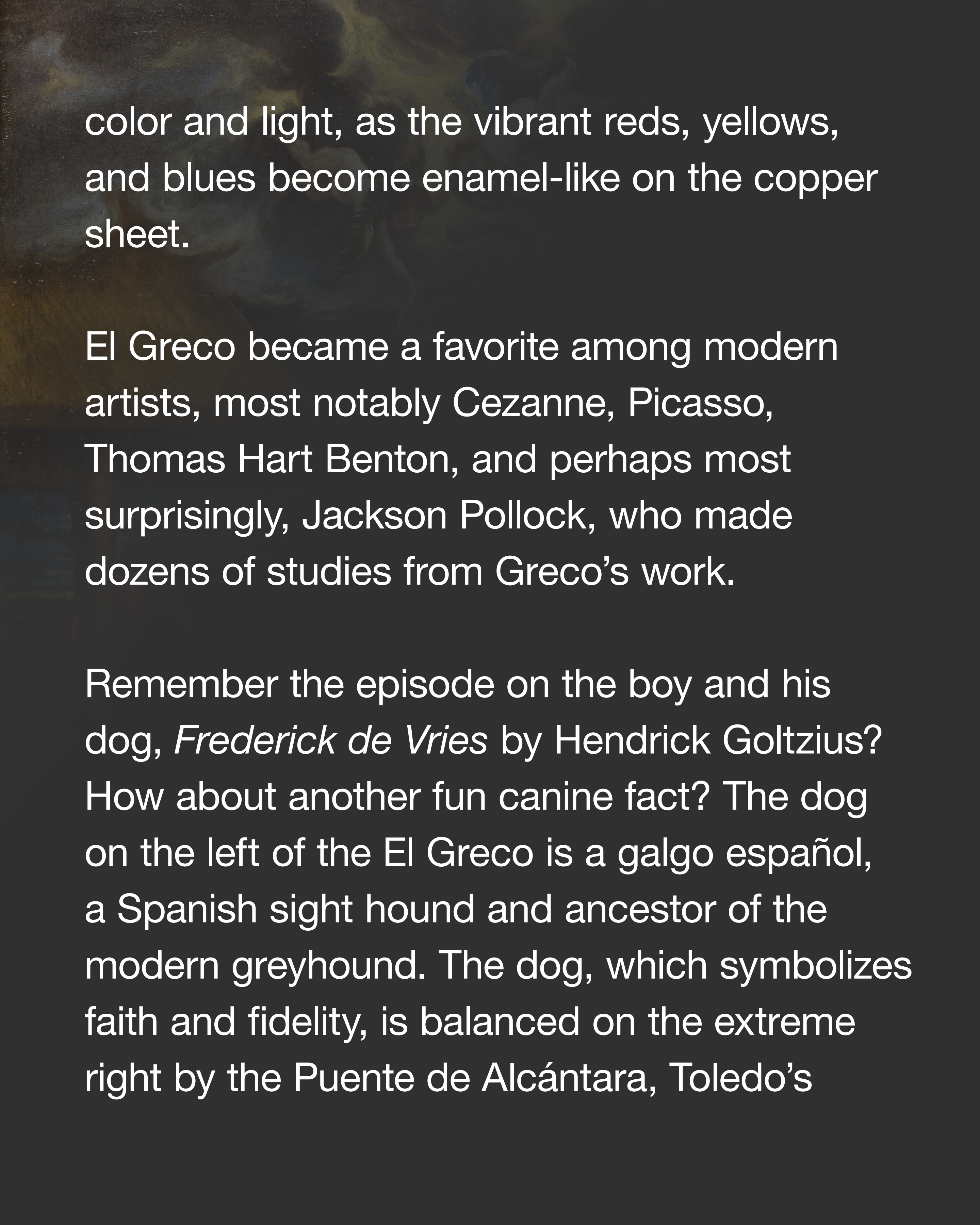
By 1570, he was in Rome, and the mystery behind his artistic conversion is essentially solved if we consider he was absorbing the examples of Titian (whose biggest patron was Philip II of Spain) and Michelangelo. El Greco, like them, had his sights set on a successful career as a court painter and with this in mind, left for Spain in 1576 at age 35.



His hopes were soon dashed as his daring, unorthodox style was met a chilly reception at the rigid royal court of Philip II.

Learned, multilingual, and devout, however, El Greco found a loyal following among the intellectual and clerical elite in Toledo, the primary seat of the Catholic Church in Spain. It also didn't hurt to have established artist friends in Toledo like Juan Sánchez Cotán, who—if you remember the episode on Sánchez Cotán's *Quince, Cabbage, Melon, and Cucumber*—lent El Greco a serious amount of money at one point.

Painted right around the year he arrived in Toledo, El Greco's painting bursts with glorious



color and light, as the vibrant reds, yellows, and blues become enamel-like on the copper sheet.

El Greco became a favorite among modern artists, most notably Cezanne, Picasso, Thomas Hart Benton, and perhaps most surprisingly, Jackson Pollock, who made dozens of studies from Greco's work.

Remember the episode on the boy and his dog, *Frederick de Vries* by Hendrick Goltzius? How about another fun canine fact? The dog on the left of the El Greco is a galgo español, a Spanish sight hound and ancestor of the modern greyhound. The dog, which symbolizes faith and fidelity, is balanced on the extreme right by the Puente de Alcántara, Toledo's

famous Roman-Islamic bridge and tower. El Greco must have been proud of his adoptive hometown to stage his beautiful nativity scene there.

This has been Doc Brown with Masterpiece Minute. Thanks for joining us here on Virtual SDMA—catch ya next Friday!

BALBOA PARK

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