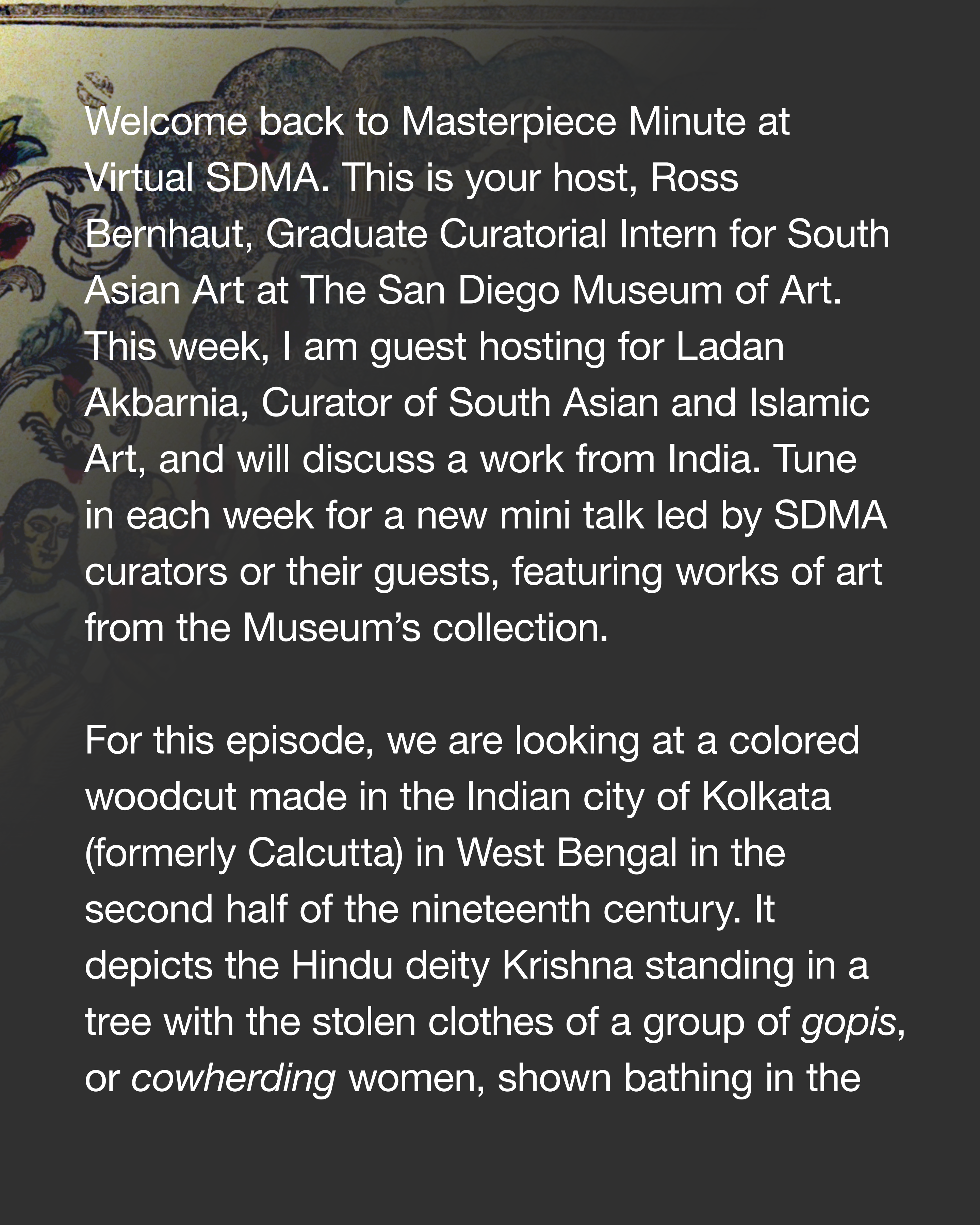


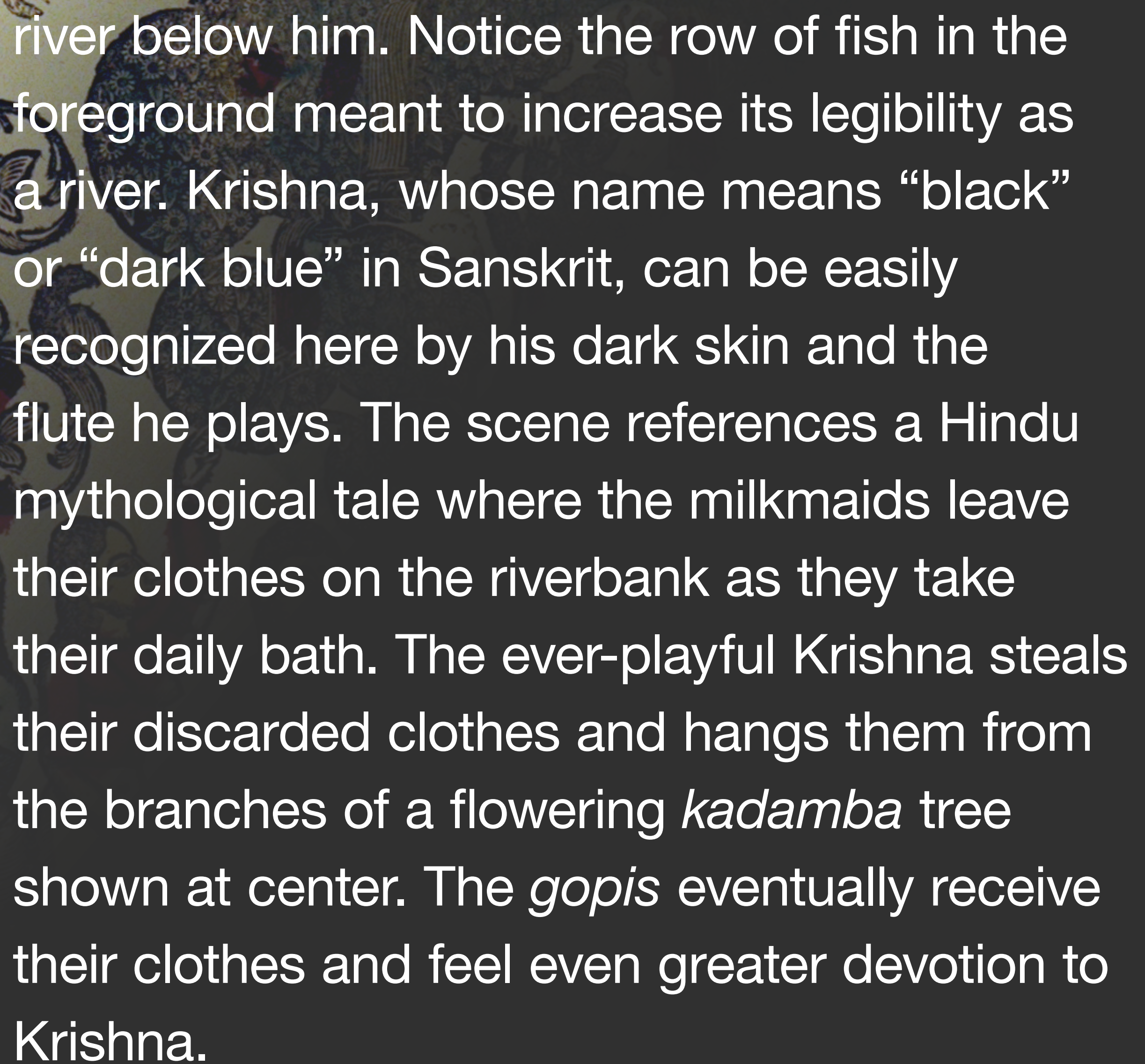
MASTERPIECE MINUTE





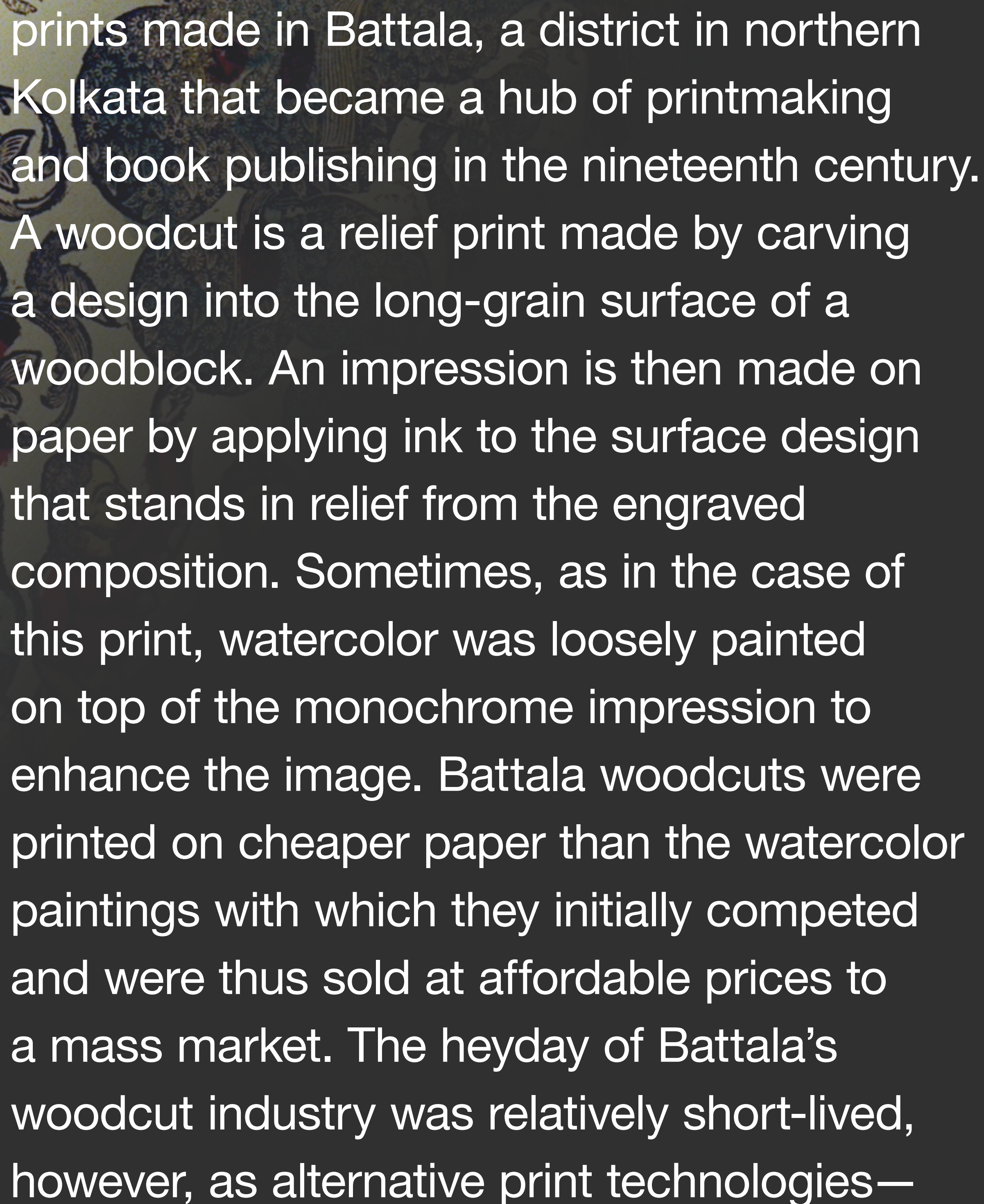
Welcome back to Masterpiece Minute at Virtual SDMA. This is your host, Ross Bernhaut, Graduate Curatorial Intern for South Asian Art at The San Diego Museum of Art. This week, I am guest hosting for Ladan Akbarnia, Curator of South Asian and Islamic Art, and will discuss a work from India. Tune in each week for a new mini talk led by SDMA curators or their guests, featuring works of art from the Museum's collection.

For this episode, we are looking at a colored woodcut made in the Indian city of Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) in West Bengal in the second half of the nineteenth century. It depicts the Hindu deity Krishna standing in a tree with the stolen clothes of a group of *gopis*, or *cowherding* women, shown bathing in the



river below him. Notice the row of fish in the foreground meant to increase its legibility as a river. Krishna, whose name means “black” or “dark blue” in Sanskrit, can be easily recognized here by his dark skin and the flute he plays. The scene references a Hindu mythological tale where the milkmaids leave their clothes on the riverbank as they take their daily bath. The ever-playful Krishna steals their discarded clothes and hangs them from the branches of a flowering *kadamba* tree shown at center. The *gopis* eventually receive their clothes and feel even greater devotion to Krishna.

Scenes from the life of Krishna and other narrative moments from myths about Hindu deities were popular subjects for woodcut

The background of the image is a dark, textured surface. On the left side, there is a vertical strip of a woodcut print. This strip features a monochrome illustration of a woman's face, looking slightly to the right. Above her head, there are stylized floral and leaf motifs. The rest of the image is a solid dark grey or black background.

prints made in Battala, a district in northern Kolkata that became a hub of printmaking and book publishing in the nineteenth century. A woodcut is a relief print made by carving a design into the long-grain surface of a woodblock. An impression is then made on paper by applying ink to the surface design that stands in relief from the engraved composition. Sometimes, as in the case of this print, watercolor was loosely painted on top of the monochrome impression to enhance the image. Battala woodcuts were printed on cheaper paper than the watercolor paintings with which they initially competed and were thus sold at affordable prices to a mass market. The heyday of Battala's woodcut industry was relatively short-lived, however, as alternative print technologies—

namely lithography and oleography—began to supplant woodcut printing in popularity by the 1880s and 1890s.

Thank you for listening. This has been Ross on Masterpiece Minute at Virtual SDMA!

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