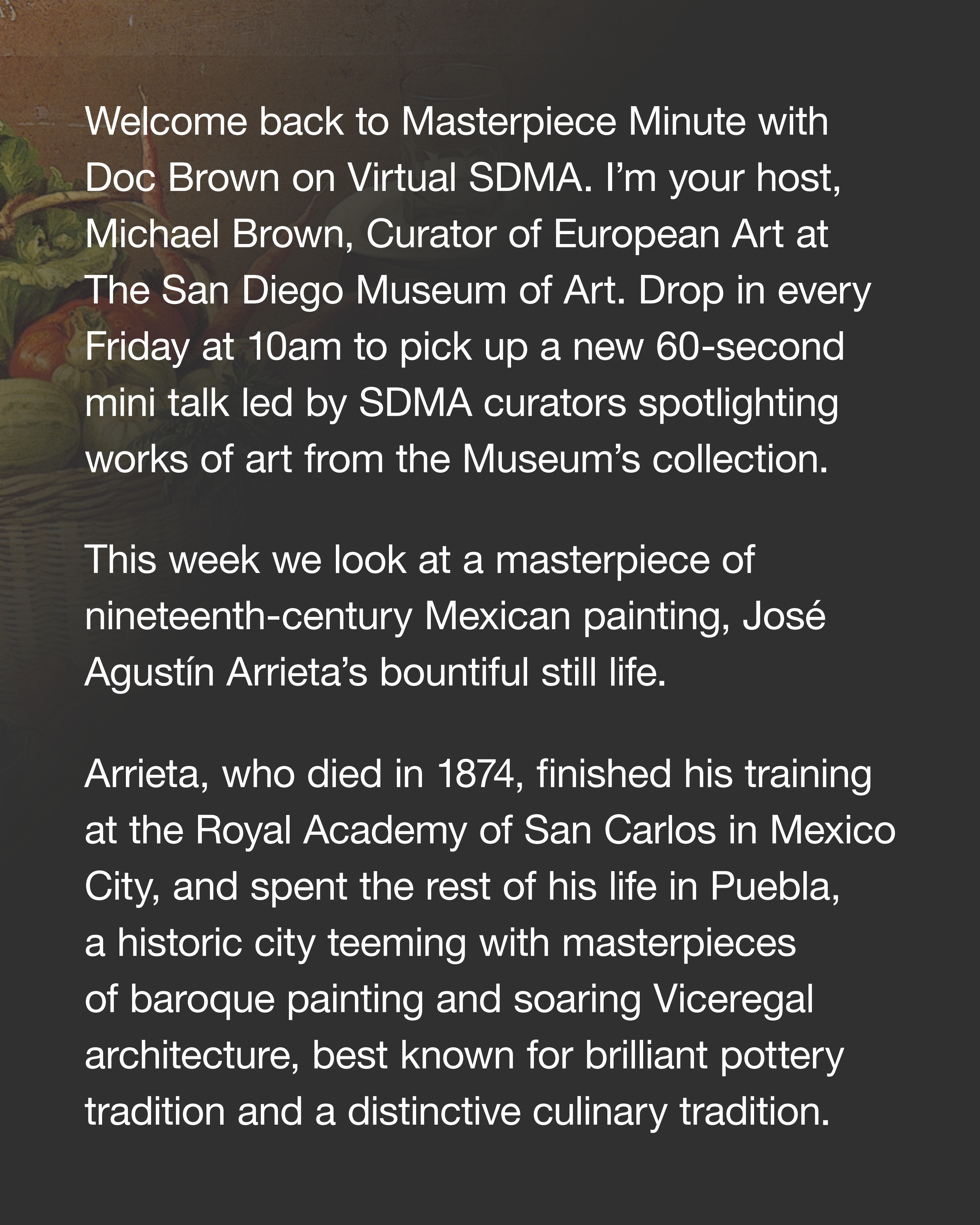


MASTERPIECE
MINUTE

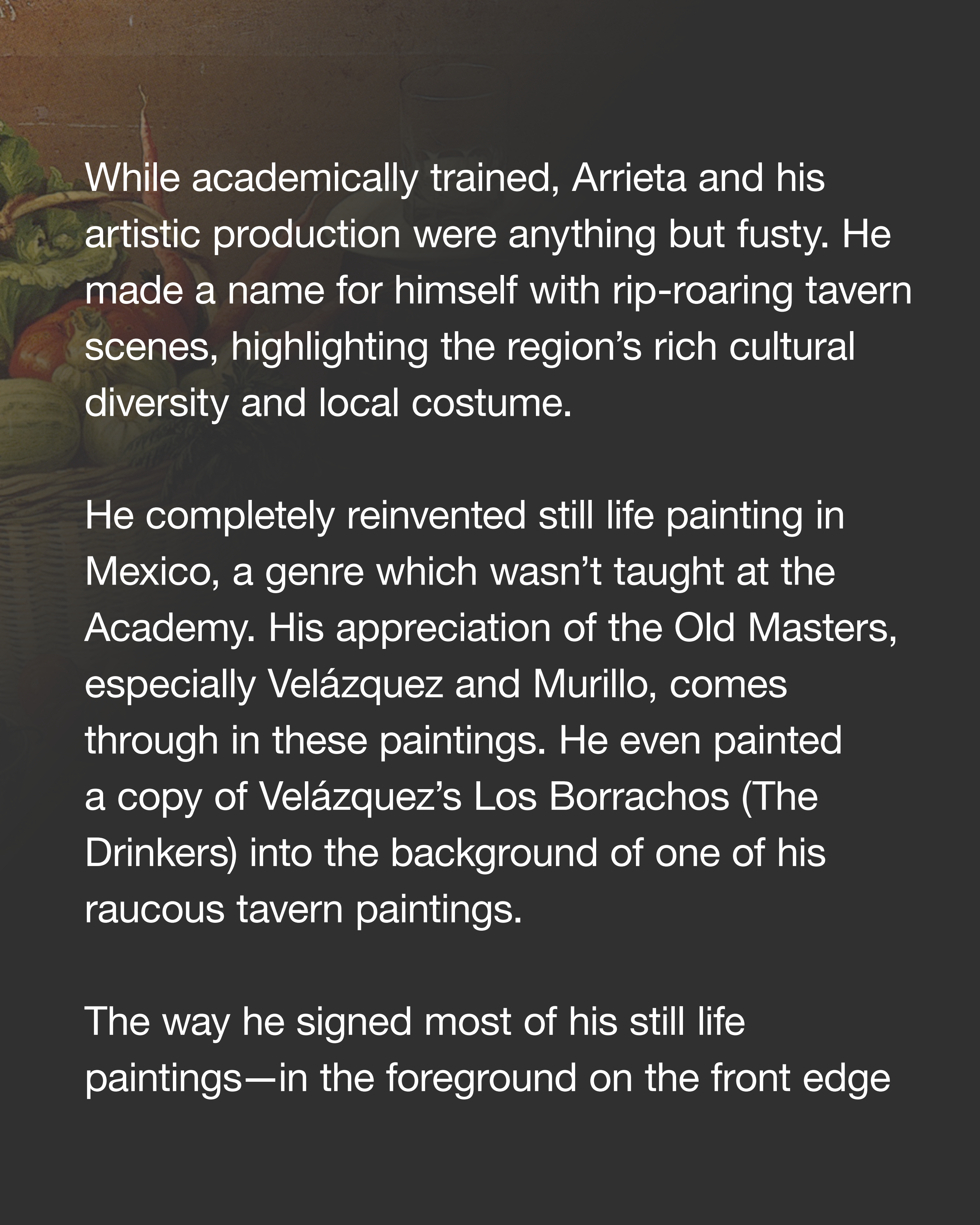




Welcome back to Masterpiece Minute with Doc Brown on Virtual SDMA. I'm your host, Michael Brown, Curator of European Art at The San Diego Museum of Art. Drop in every Friday at 10am to pick up a new 60-second mini talk led by SDMA curators spotlighting works of art from the Museum's collection.

This week we look at a masterpiece of nineteenth-century Mexican painting, José Agustín Arrieta's bountiful still life.

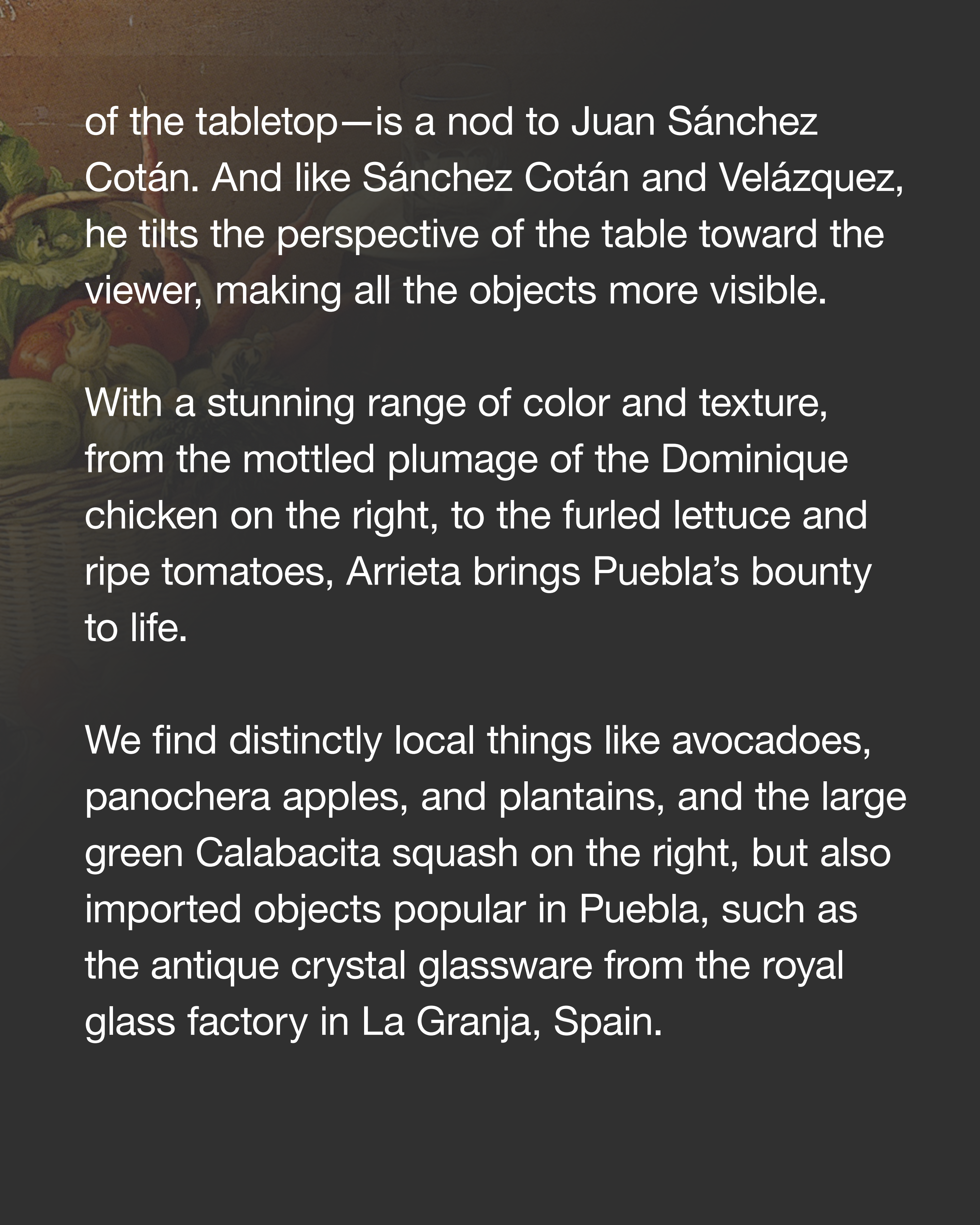
Arrieta, who died in 1874, finished his training at the Royal Academy of San Carlos in Mexico City, and spent the rest of his life in Puebla, a historic city teeming with masterpieces of baroque painting and soaring Viceregal architecture, best known for brilliant pottery tradition and a distinctive culinary tradition.

A still life painting featuring a variety of fresh vegetables, including a large green bell pepper, a red tomato, a yellow squash, and a bunch of leafy greens, all arranged on a wooden surface. In the background, a simple glass is visible. The lighting is soft, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere.

While academically trained, Arrieta and his artistic production were anything but fusty. He made a name for himself with rip-roaring tavern scenes, highlighting the region's rich cultural diversity and local costume.

He completely reinvented still life painting in Mexico, a genre which wasn't taught at the Academy. His appreciation of the Old Masters, especially Velázquez and Murillo, comes through in these paintings. He even painted a copy of Velázquez's *Los Borrachos* (The Drinkers) into the background of one of his raucous tavern paintings.

The way he signed most of his still life paintings—in the foreground on the front edge



of the tabletop—is a nod to Juan Sánchez Cotán. And like Sánchez Cotán and Velázquez, he tilts the perspective of the table toward the viewer, making all the objects more visible.

With a stunning range of color and texture, from the mottled plumage of the Dominique chicken on the right, to the furled lettuce and ripe tomatoes, Arrieta brings Puebla's bounty to life.

We find distinctly local things like avocados, panochera apples, and plantains, and the large green Calabacita squash on the right, but also imported objects popular in Puebla, such as the antique crystal glassware from the royal glass factory in La Granja, Spain.



The inclusion of the blue-and-white Chinese porcelain cup on the left, which Arrieta has filled with olives and serrano peppers (native to Puebla), serves as a reminder that Mexico had been at the crossroads of European and American exchange with Asia through the Manila Galleon trade since the late 1500s.

For Arrieta, every object was chosen with careful intention, and even the vino tinto (red wine) in the cask and covered decanter, may contain a subtle reference to Independence. Spain had banned winemaking in Mexico in 1699—it had flourished for the previous two centuries—and wine wasn't produced in quantity until after Independence in 1823, when Arrieta was a young man.

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

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