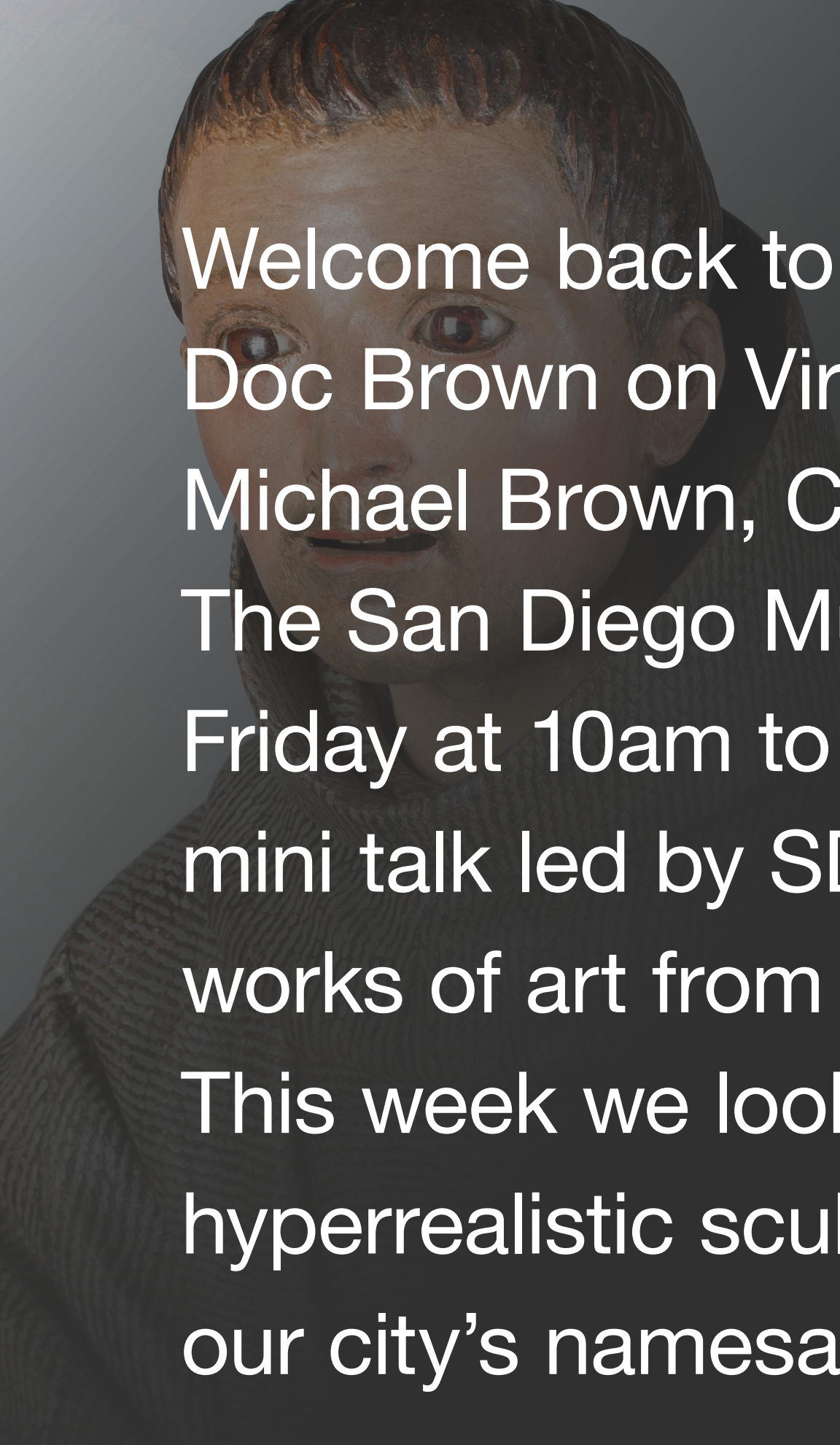


MASTERPIECE
MINUTE





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 hyperrealistic sculpture in painted wood of our city's namesake, San Diego de Alcalá.

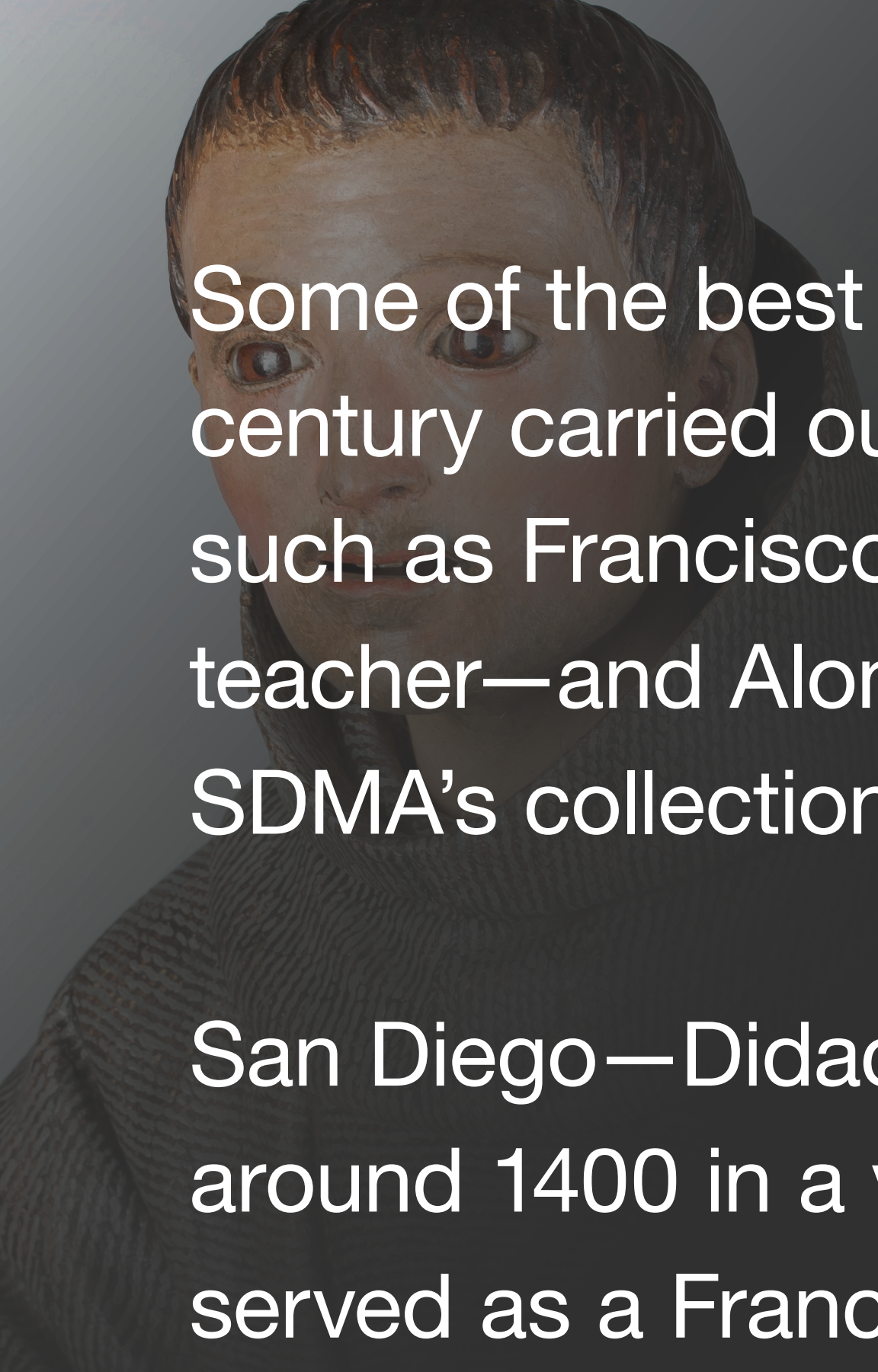
Pedro de Mena was born in Granada, in the south of Spain, in 1628, and after managing his father's sculpture workshop eventually moved to Málaga to set up what was to become Spain's most successful sculpture studio of the second half of the seventeenth century.



He worked in Spain's highly naturalistic sculpture style, which featured the highly developed tradition of encarnación, literally incarnation, the bringing to life. This lifelike quality was achieved by a painstaking process beginning with sanding the wood sculpture and covering it in white gesso ground.

A specialist would then paint it and repeatedly varnish and burnish the surface to create the illusion of warm flesh, even including a subcutaneous layer with visible capillaries and blood vessels.

Here the sculptor has used ivory or bone for San Diego's teeth, and reverse-painting glass for his eyes. Often human or horse hair was used as well.



Some of the best known painters of the century carried out this lifelike encarnación, such as Francisco Pacheco—Velázquez’s teacher—and Alonso Cano, whose work is in SDMA’s collection.

San Diego—Didacus in English—was born around 1400 in a village near Seville, and served as a Franciscan missionary in the Canary Islands before returning to the mainland. Against the orders of his abbot, Diego stole bread from the monastery’s bakery to feed the poor. Hiding the bread in his robes, he was confronted by the abbot, only to have the bread turn into roses upon discovery.

The sculpture’s hands and waist are positioned to hold cut roses, or those made of silk or

paper. The saint's expression of surprise would have only been heightened by the presence of such a floral offering as he strides unshod toward the viewer.

Speaking of bringing things to life, in the early 1560s, Philip II of Spain commissioned his royal clock master, Juanelo Turriano - an early pioneer of robotics – to build an extraordinary walking, talking San Diego automaton who appears to pray the Mea Culpa beating his chest with a rosary in his hand.

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

