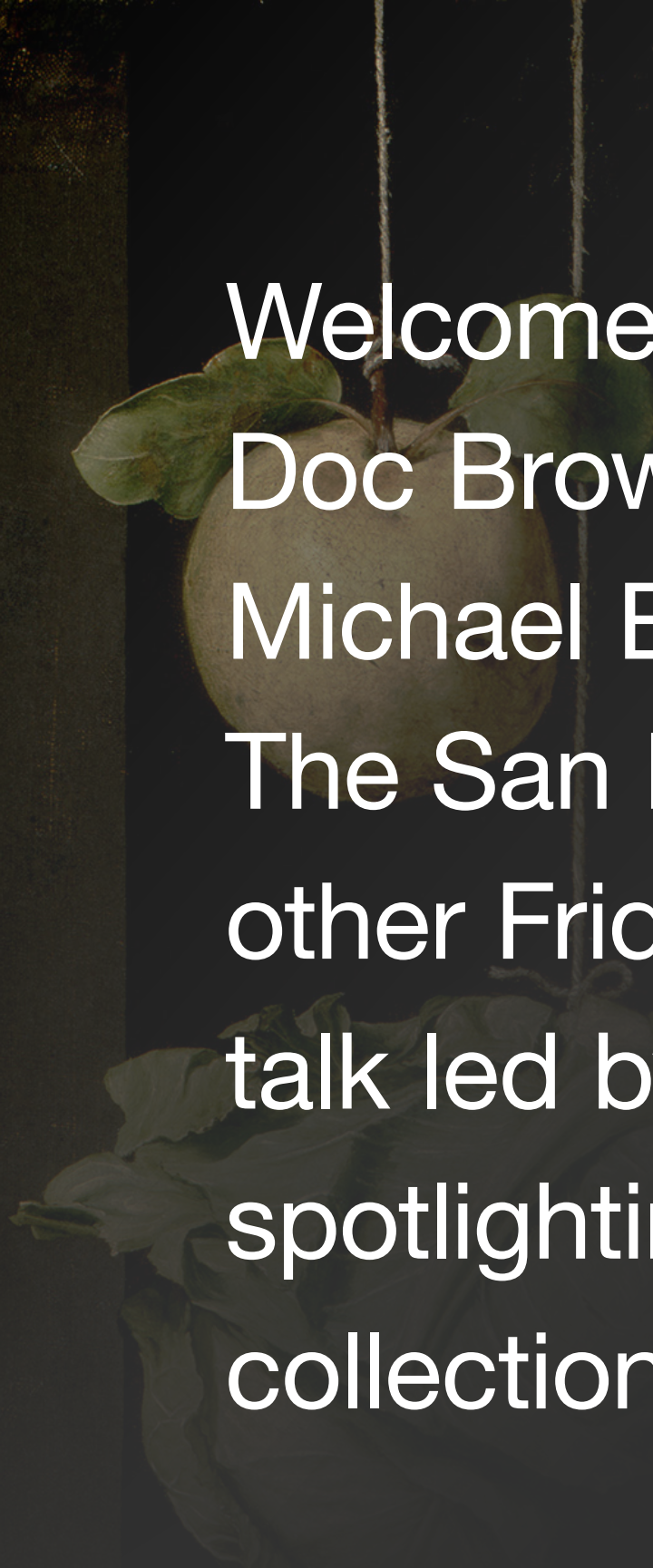


MASTERPIECE
MINUTE

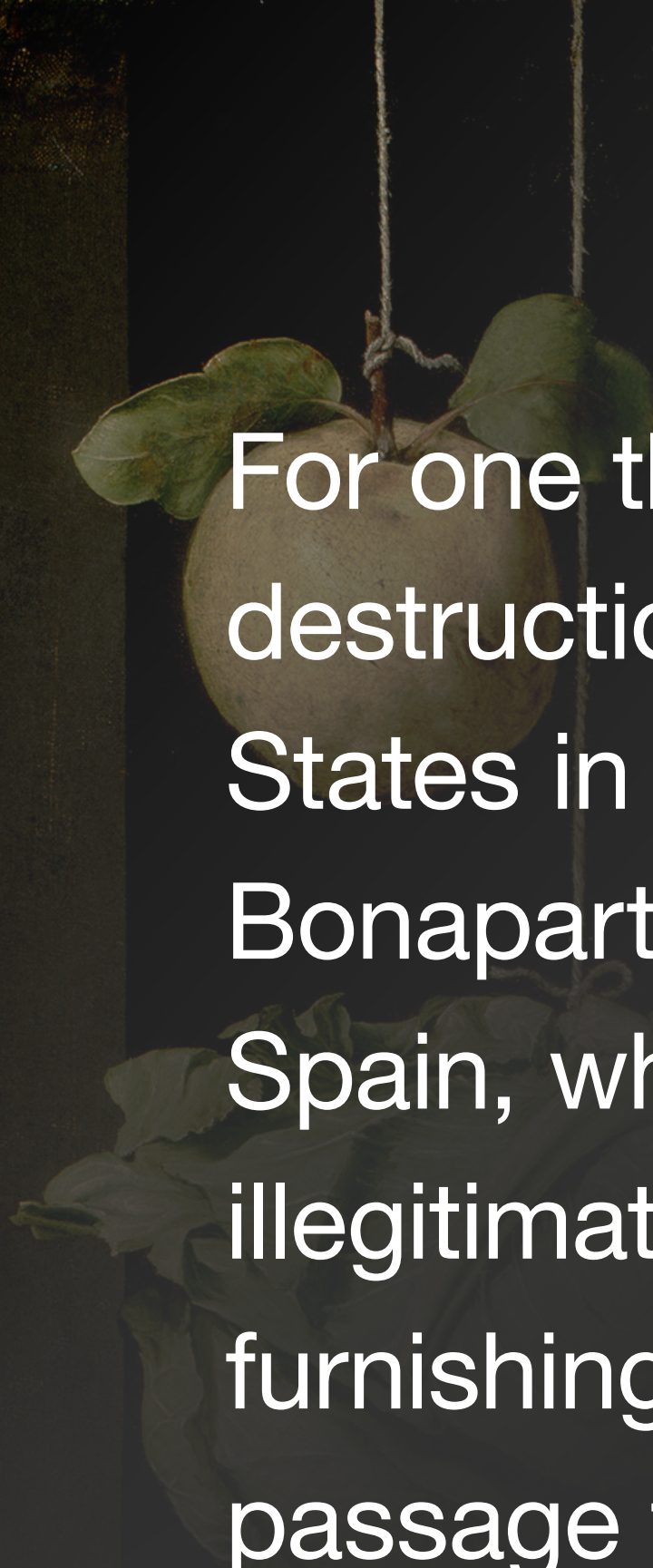




Welcome back to Masterpiece Minute with Doc Brown on Virtual SDMA. I'm your host, Michael Brown, Curator of European Art at The San Diego Museum of Art. Drop in every other Friday at 10am to pick up a new mini talk led by SDMA curators and special guests spotlighting works of art from the Museum's collection.

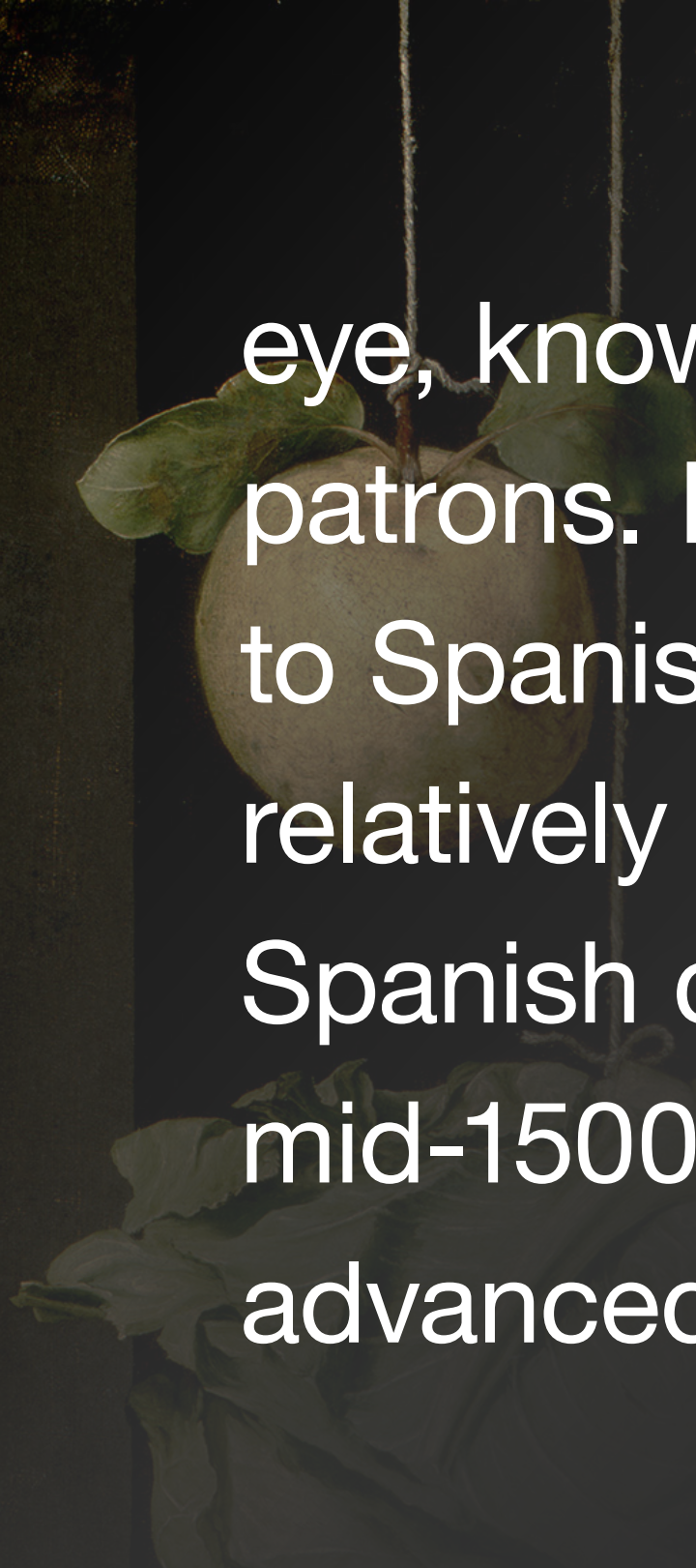
This week, we return to a familiar character here on Masterpiece Minute—Juan Sánchez Cotán. This is Part Two of the captivating tale of the still life we heard about in Episode One.

Deceptively simple in its composition, *Quince, Cabbage, Melon, and Cucumber* offers a multilayered story both in what it depicts, and in what it has endured over its more than 400-year history.



For one thing, the painting narrowly escaped destruction soon after it arrived in the United States in 1815. Napoleon's brother, Joseph Bonaparte, owned the painting when he fled Spain, where he had been deposed as the illegitimate "Intruder" king, hauling off luxury furnishings by the cartload. He found safe passage to New Jersey, of all places, where he and his daughter built a palatial country house, called Breeze Point. By some miraculous accident of history, our still life was on loan to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia when Breeze Point was destroyed in an infernal conflagration.

Surely the assortment of produce in the painting must mean more than meets the



eye, knowing Sánchez Cotán and his learned patrons. Each fruit and vegetable is essential to Spanish cuisine, the idea of which was relatively new in 1600. By the time the first Spanish cookbooks were published in the mid-1500s, Toledo and Granada had the most advanced and diverse farm practice in Europe.

Foods we think of as Spanish staples, such as quince (used for dulce de membrillo), citrus, rice, cabbage, grapes and olives, as well as transformative irrigation systems, were all introduced to Iberia during what became known as the Arab Agricultural Revolution. Ibn Bassal, the eleventh-century Islamic court botanist in Toledo, brought seeds and plants from Iran and India. He even dedicated a chapter in his most important treatise to the

A still life painting featuring a pear and a cabbage hanging from a thin, light-colored string against a dark, textured background. The pear is positioned higher and is a pale, yellowish-green color with a few green leaves attached to its stem. The cabbage is positioned lower and is a darker, more muted green. The lighting is soft, highlighting the textures of the fruit and vegetables.

cultivation of cucumbers and melons.

And the prominent cabbage we see is a primary ingredient of *cocido madrileño*, the classic stew whose culinary origins lie in the Sephardic dish *adafina*, slow-cooked overnight to avoid manual labor in observance of the Jewish Sabbath.

Spanish cuisine was, and is, a rich medley of Asian, Jewish, Islamic, and by Sánchez Cotán's day, American, components. The painting is a reminder that food, like language and art, is often a delicious reflection of cultural exchange.

This has been Doc Brown with Masterpiece Minute. Thanks for joining us here on Virtual SDMA!

BALBOA PARK
THE SAN DIEGO
MUSEUM OF ART

