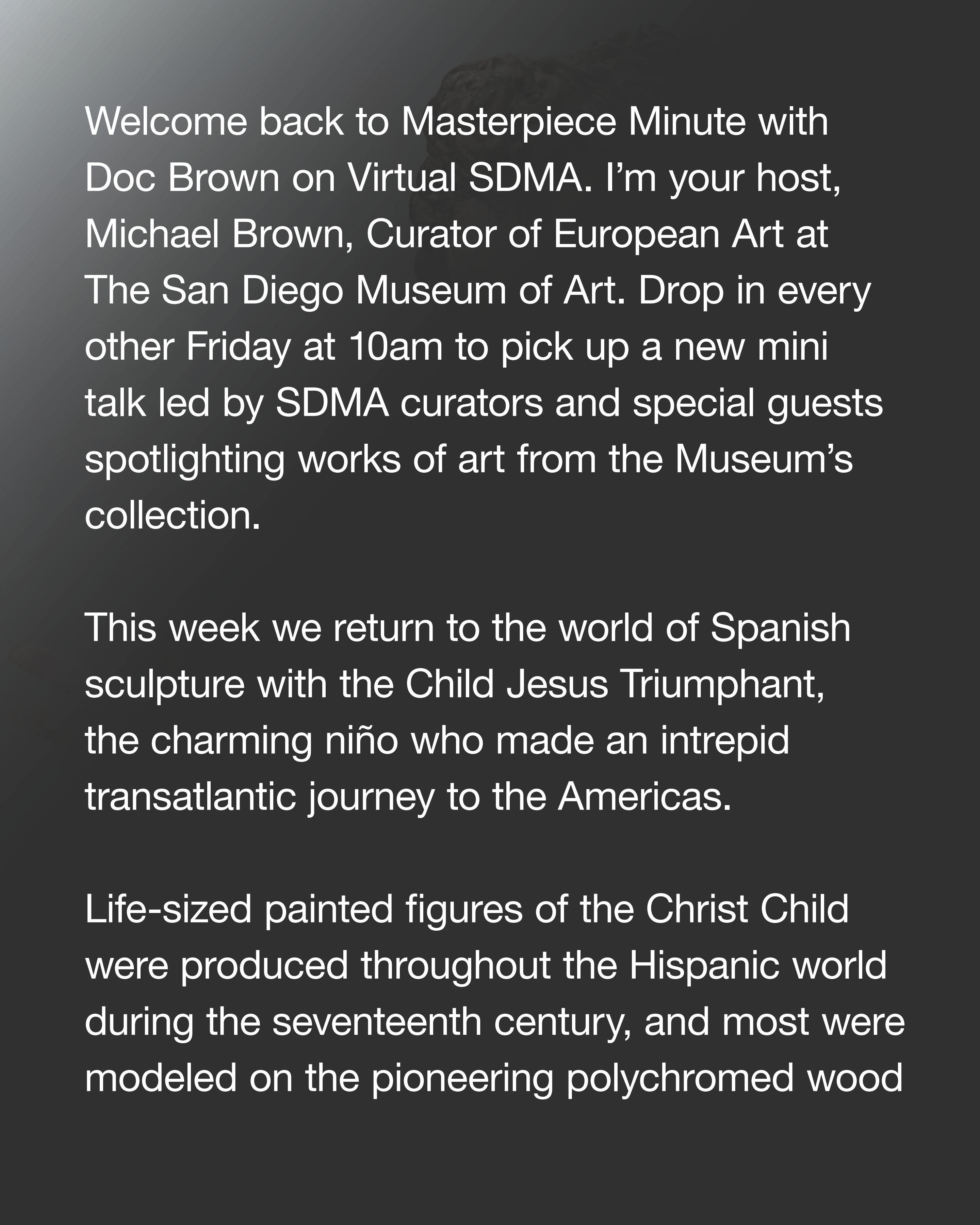


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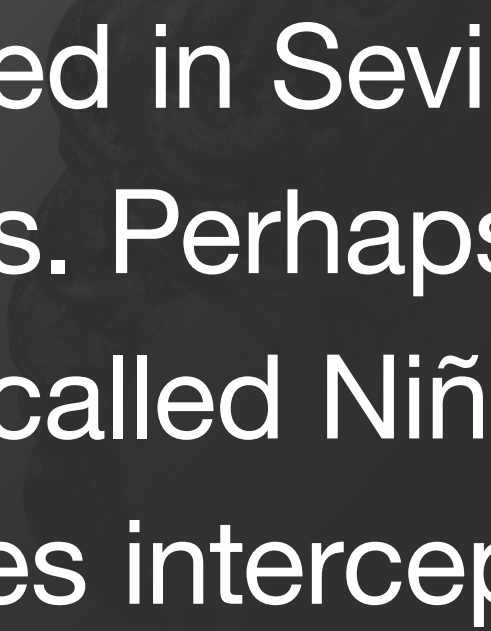




Welcome back to Masterpiece Minute with Doc Brown on Virtual SDMA. I'm your host, Michael Brown, Curator of European Art at The San Diego Museum of Art. Drop in every other Friday at 10am to pick up a new mini talk led by SDMA curators and special guests spotlighting works of art from the Museum's collection.

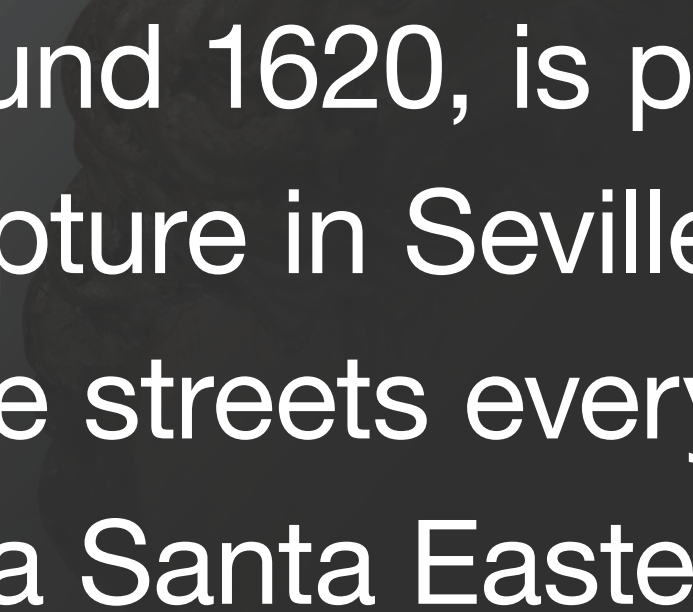
This week we return to the world of Spanish sculpture with the Child Jesus Triumphant, the charming niño who made an intrepid transatlantic journey to the Americas.

Life-sized painted figures of the Christ Child were produced throughout the Hispanic world during the seventeenth century, and most were modeled on the pioneering polychromed wood



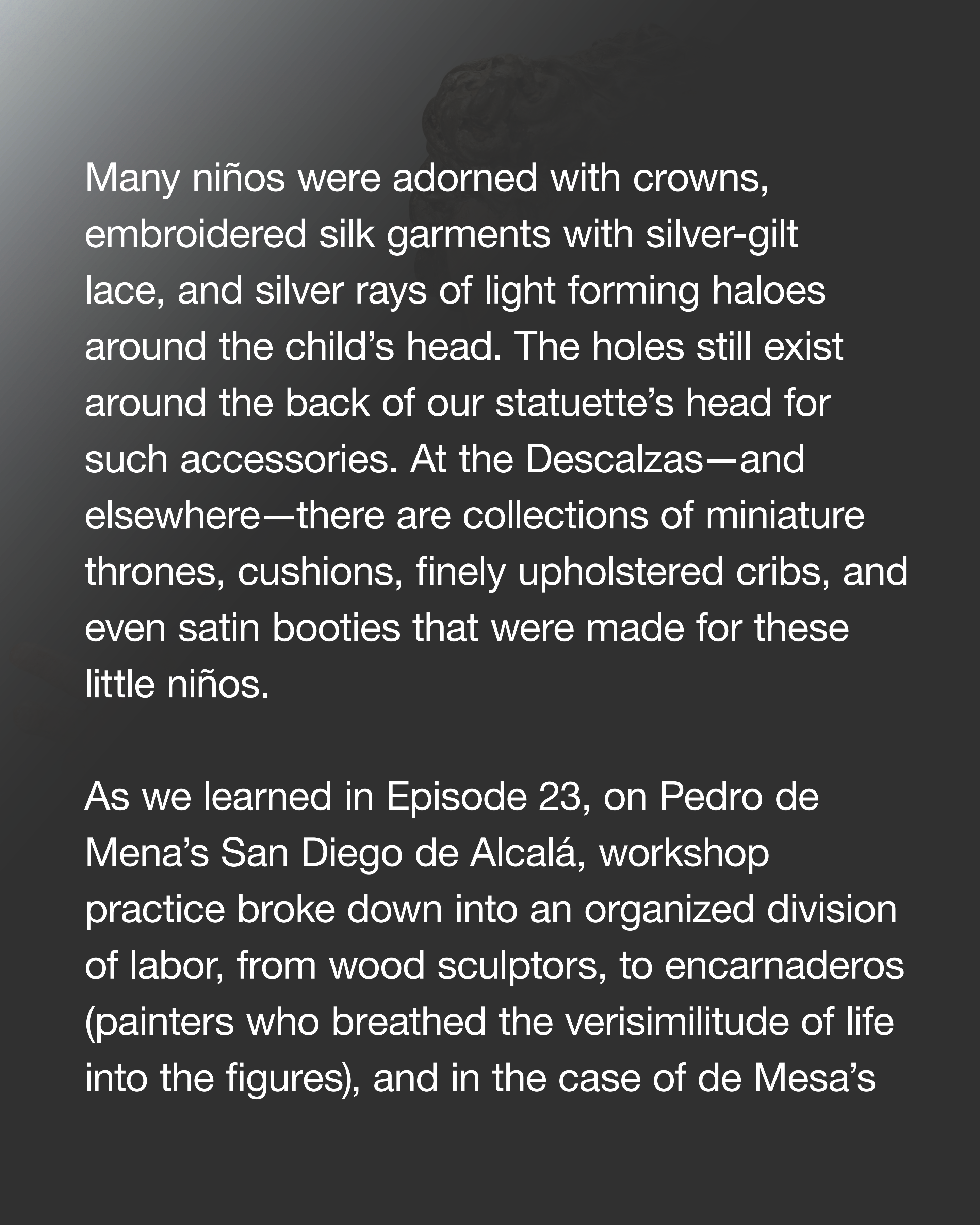
sculptures produced in Seville, Spain, by Juan Martínez Montañés. Perhaps the most famous of these is the so-called Niño Cautivo (Captive Child), which pirates intercepted en route from Seville to the port of Veracruz on the Gulf of Mexico. Holding the sculpture for ransom, the pirates extracted a considerable sum. The statue has been in the Cathedral of Mexico City since 1629.

Juan de Mesa y Velasco was the leading assistant in the Martínez workshop before setting up a successful independent sculpture workshop. De Mesa, along with later artists Pedro de Mena and Luisa Roldán, heightened and humanized Martínez's highly realistic approach to wood sculpture. His monumental wood figure of Christ El Gran Poder (the Great



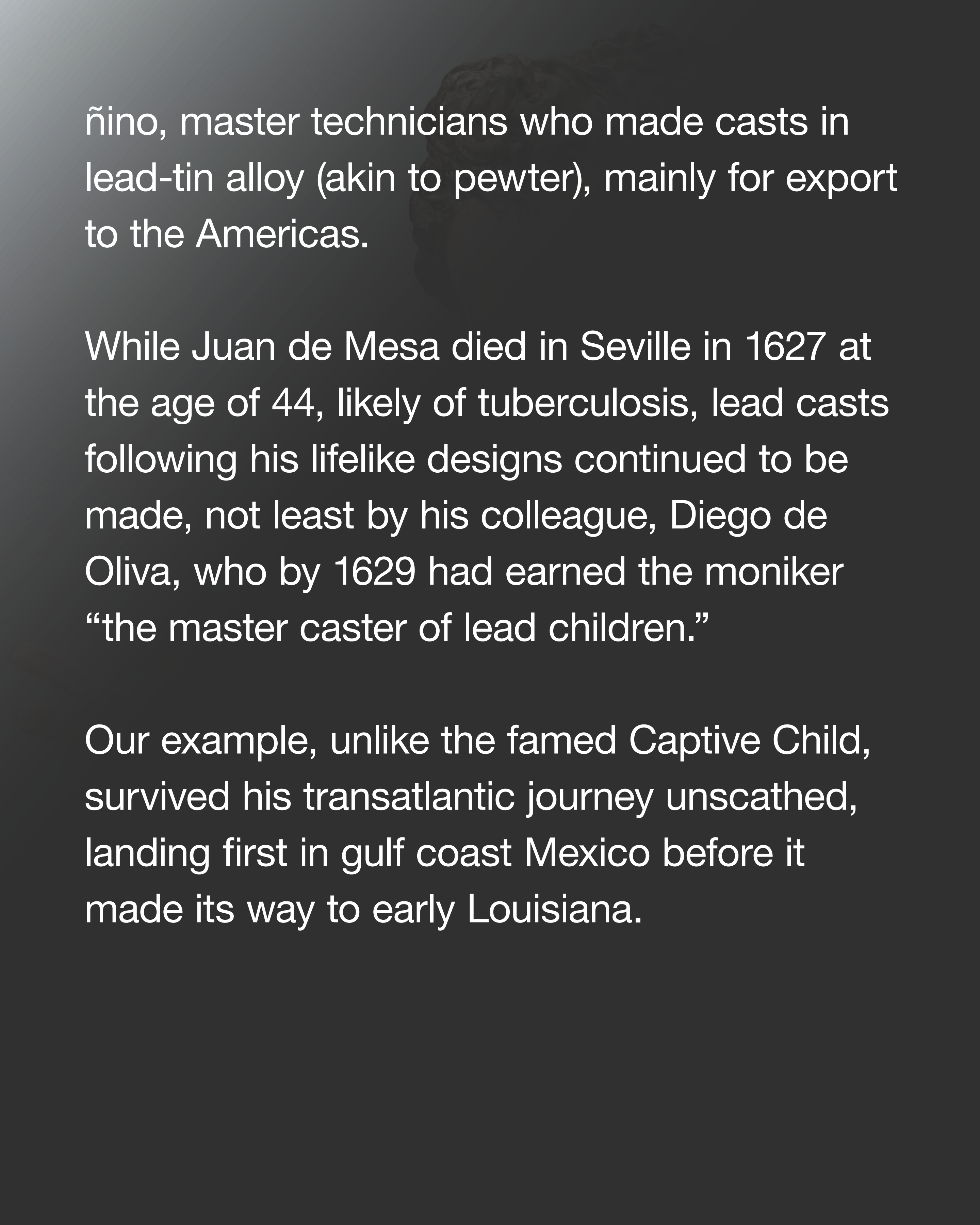
Power), made around 1620, is probably the most famous sculpture in Seville – it is still carried through the streets every Good Friday during the Semana Santa Easter processions.

Like these Andalusian sculptures, figures of the Infant Jesus – including ours by Juan de Mesa – would have been clothed on certain occasions of the year, often in sumptuous and ornate robes. The largest collection of such niños is found at the Monastery of the Descalzas Reales in Madrid, the royal convent in the former palace of Charles V originally founded to house young widows and unmarried noblewomen. Many of the nuns and lay sisters commissioned such sculptures, several of which survive that closely resemble today's example.



Many niños were adorned with crowns, embroidered silk garments with silver-gilt lace, and silver rays of light forming haloes around the child's head. The holes still exist around the back of our statuette's head for such accessories. At the Descalzas—and elsewhere—there are collections of miniature thrones, cushions, finely upholstered cribs, and even satin booties that were made for these little niños.

As we learned in Episode 23, on Pedro de Mena's San Diego de Alcalá, workshop practice broke down into an organized division of labor, from wood sculptors, to encarnaderos (painters who breathed the verisimilitude of life into the figures), and in the case of de Mesa's



ño, master technicians who made casts in lead-tin alloy (akin to pewter), mainly for export to the Americas.

While Juan de Mesa died in Seville in 1627 at the age of 44, likely of tuberculosis, lead casts following his lifelike designs continued to be made, not least by his colleague, Diego de Oliva, who by 1629 had earned the moniker “the master caster of lead children.”

Our example, unlike the famed Captive Child, survived his transatlantic journey unscathed, landing first in gulf coast Mexico before it made its way to early Louisiana.

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

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