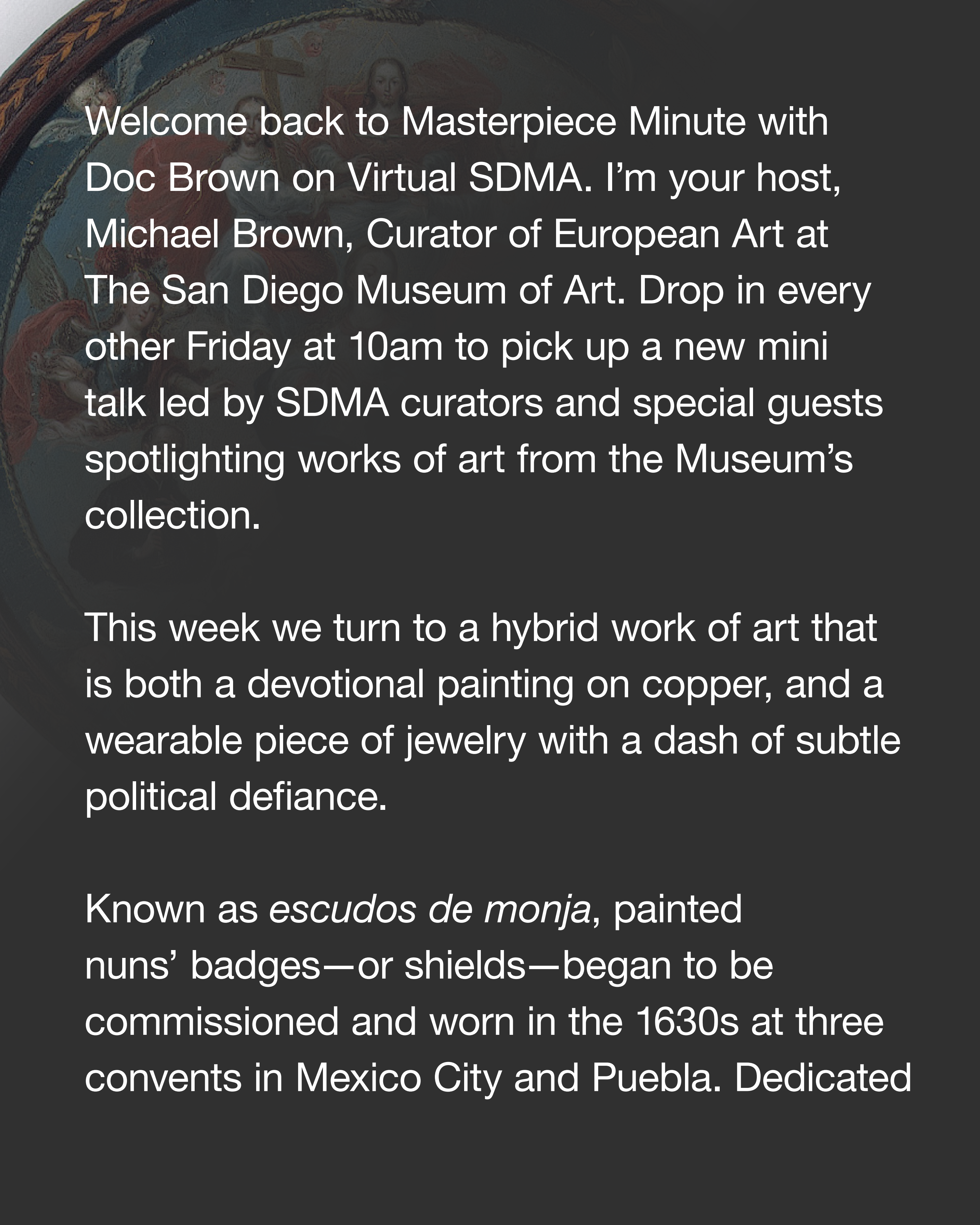


MASTERPIECE
MINUTE






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 turn to a hybrid work of art that is both a devotional painting on copper, and a wearable piece of jewelry with a dash of subtle political defiance.

Known as *escudos de monja*, painted nuns' badges—or shields—began to be commissioned and worn in the 1630s at three convents in Mexico City and Puebla. Dedicated

A circular painting, likely a medallion or a small fresco, depicting the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. Mary is seated in the center, wearing a red mantle over a blue gown, with a white dove above her head. She is surrounded by several figures, including saints and angels, in a heavenly setting. The painting is framed by a decorative border.

to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin and to Saint Jerome, these Conceptionist convents were home to nuns from some of the wealthiest families in New Spain.

Fray Miguel de Herrera was born in San Cristóbal de La Laguna, in Spain's Canary Islands, and joined the Augustinian order before setting sail for Mexico in 1719. Working in the capital and in Puebla, he became a leading portraitist in Creole (meaning American-born Spanish) society.

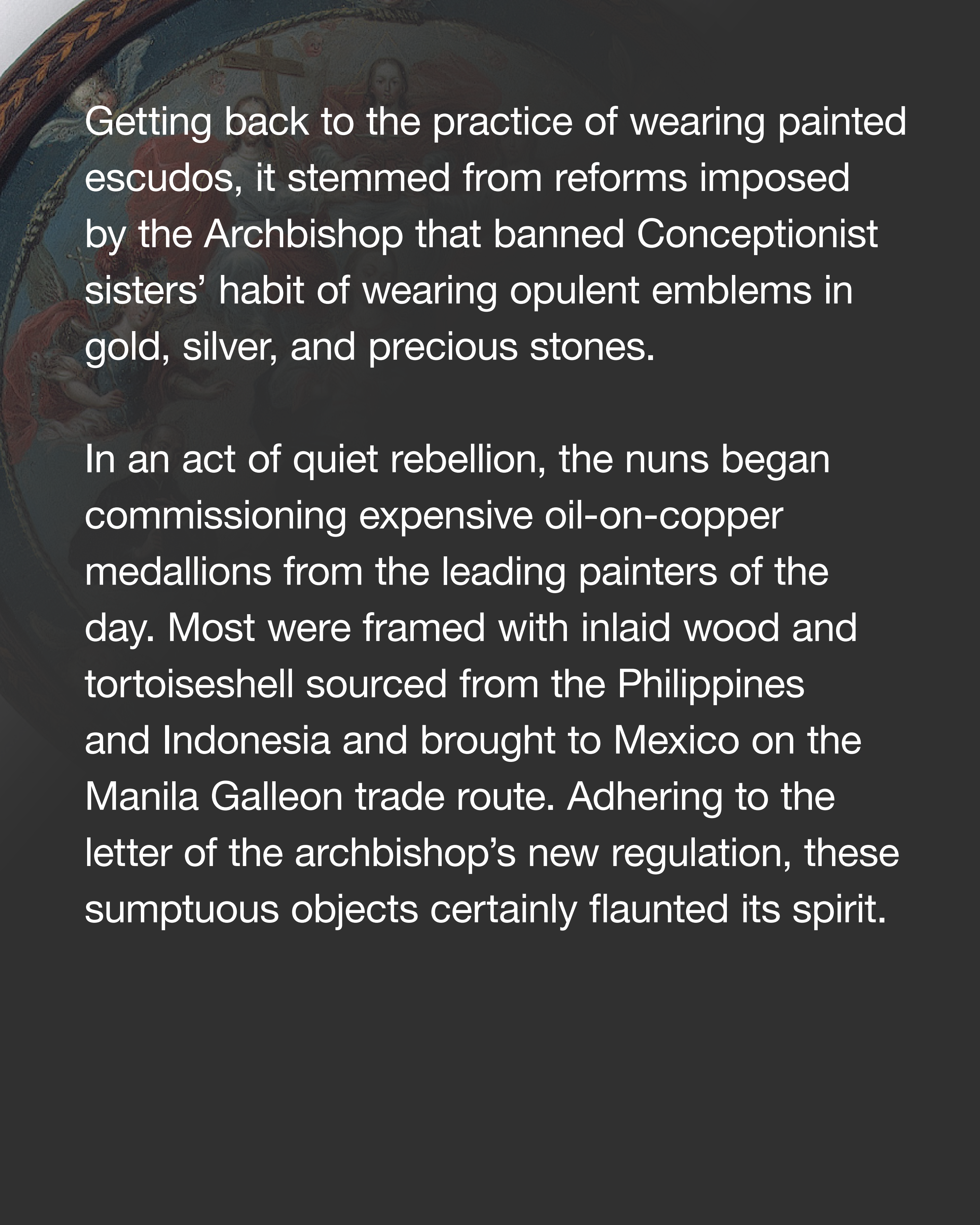
Working with a miniaturist's touch and attention to detail, Fray Miguel populates the scene around Mary with the three figures of the Trinity, and moving clockwise, Joseph, Francis Xavier, Anthony of Padua, Francis of Assisi,



Ignatius of Loyola, and the Archangel Michael.

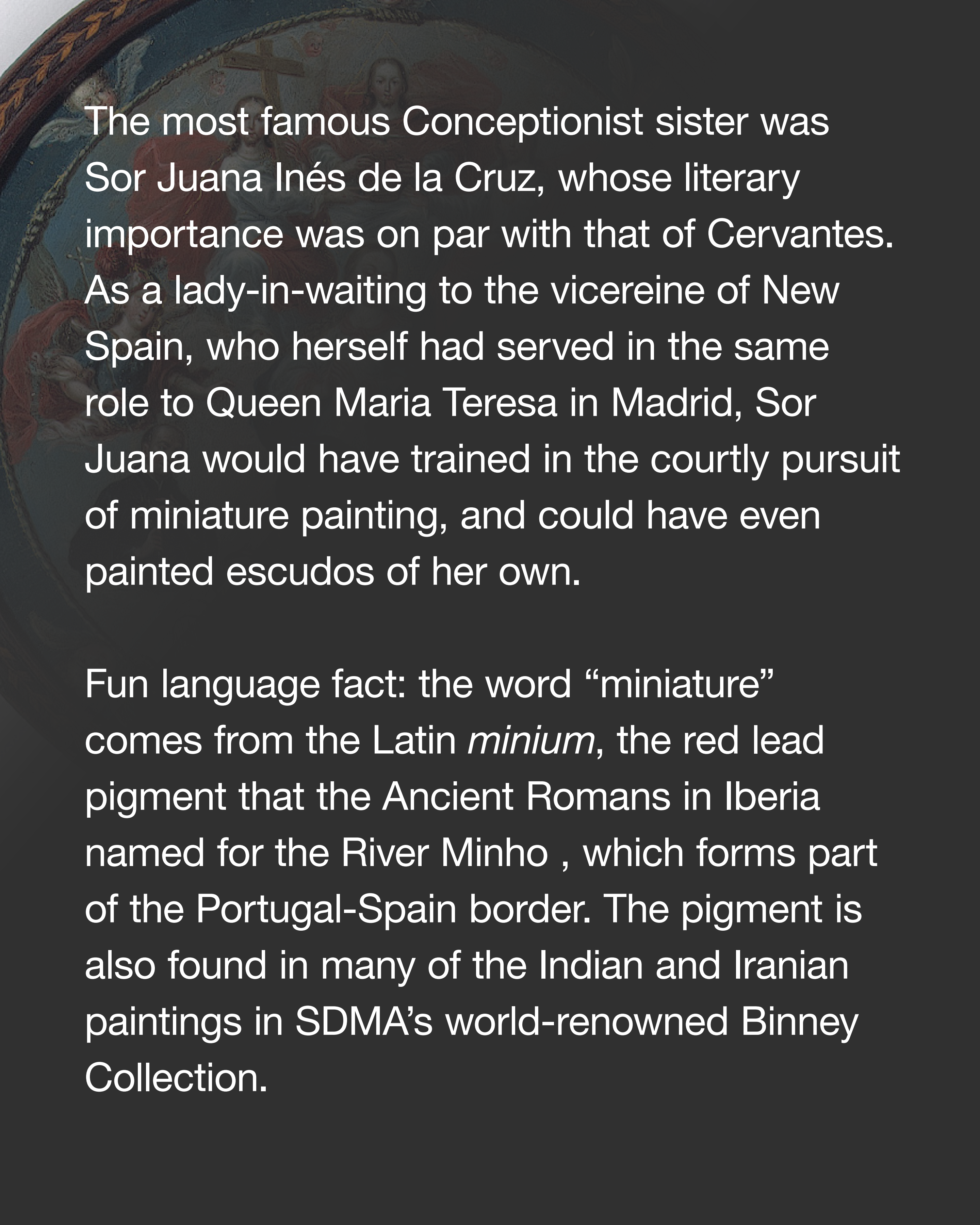
The entire composition is ringed by a circular register of eight putti heads. Three of these winged creatures support the Virgin herself while she stands on a crescent moon. This iconography is consistent with the then-controversial notion of Mary's own freedom from original sin, known as the Immaculate Conception.

The iconography was delineated by none other than Francisco Pacheco, teacher and father-in-law of Diego Velázquez, in Pacheco's treatise, *The Art of Painting*.



Getting back to the practice of wearing painted escudos, it stemmed from reforms imposed by the Archbishop that banned Conceptionist sisters' habit of wearing opulent emblems in gold, silver, and precious stones.

In an act of quiet rebellion, the nuns began commissioning expensive oil-on-copper medallions from the leading painters of the day. Most were framed with inlaid wood and tortoiseshell sourced from the Philippines and Indonesia and brought to Mexico on the Manila Galleon trade route. Adhering to the letter of the archbishop's new regulation, these sumptuous objects certainly flaunted its spirit.



The most famous Conceptionist sister was Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, whose literary importance was on par with that of Cervantes. As a lady-in-waiting to the vicereine of New Spain, who herself had served in the same role to Queen Maria Teresa in Madrid, Sor Juana would have trained in the courtly pursuit of miniature painting, and could have even painted escudos of her own.

Fun language fact: the word “miniature” comes from the Latin *minium*, the red lead pigment that the Ancient Romans in Iberia named for the River Minho , which forms part of the Portugal-Spain border. The pigment is also found in many of the Indian and Iranian paintings in SDMA’s world-renowned Binney Collection.

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

BALBOA PARK

THE SAN DIEGO
MUSEUM OF ART

