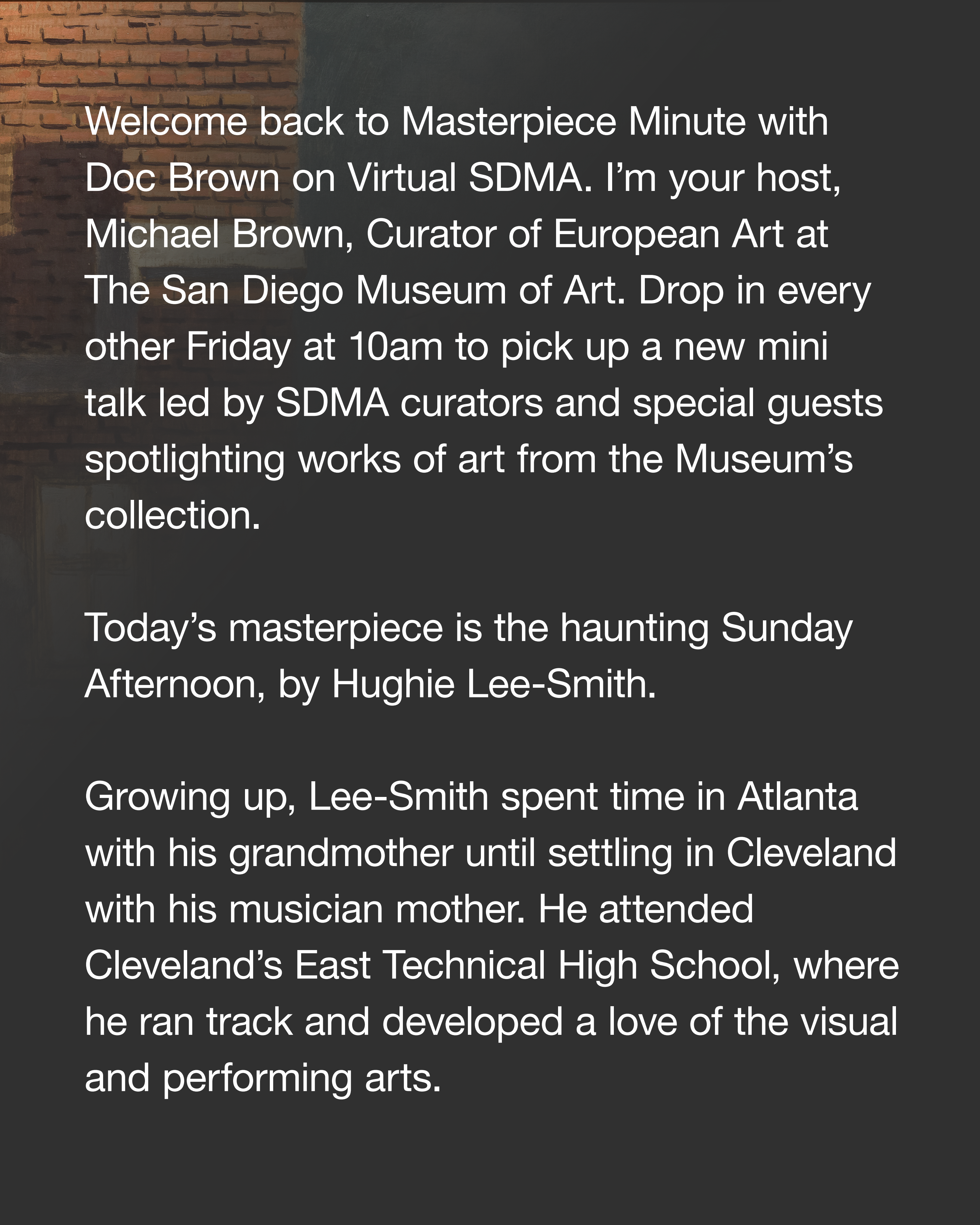


MASTERPIECE  
MINUTE





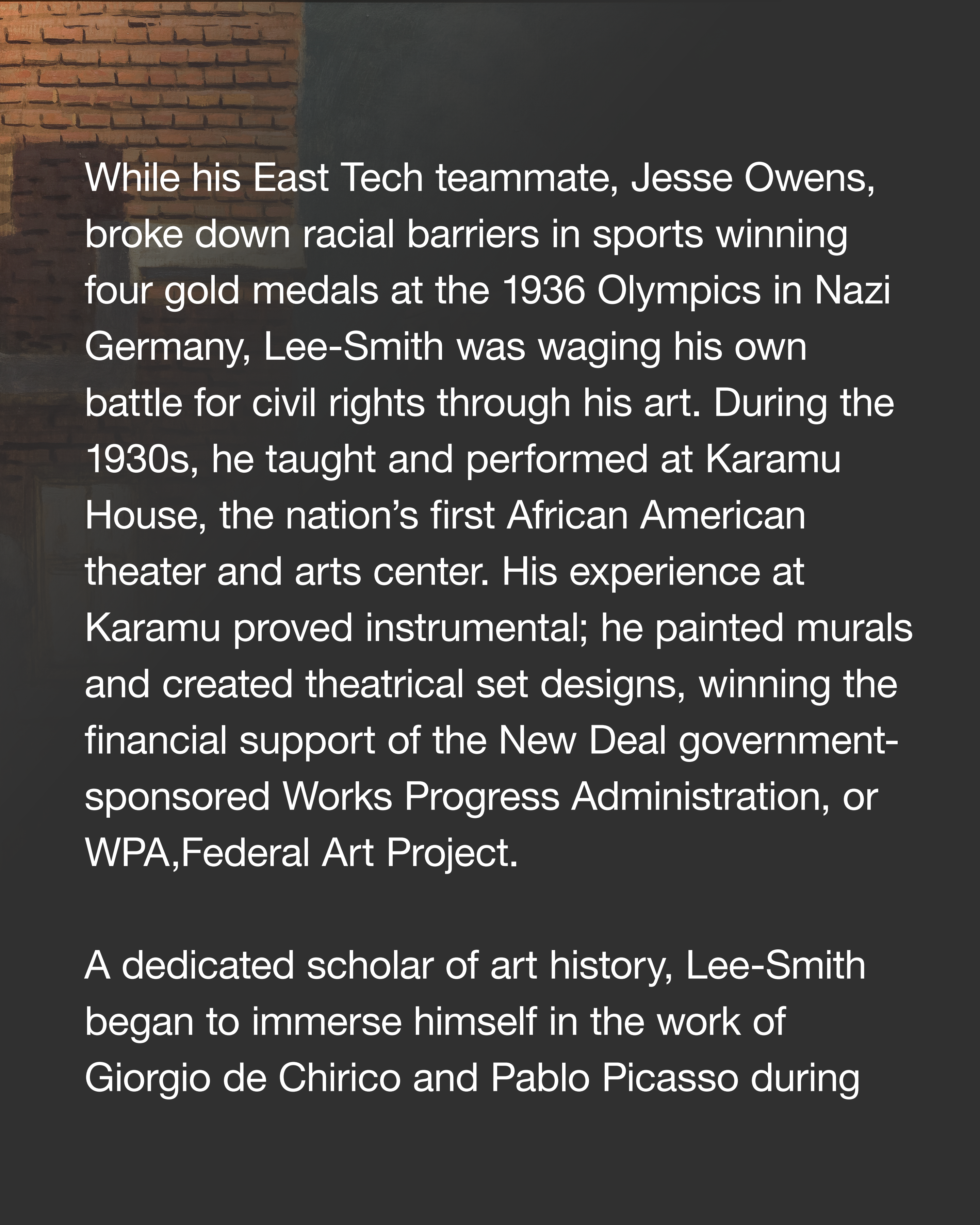


Welcome back to Masterpiece Minute with Doc Brown on Virtual SDMA. I'm your host, Michael Brown, Curator of European Art at The San Diego Museum of Art. Drop in every other Friday at 10am to pick up a new mini talk led by SDMA curators and special guests spotlighting works of art from the Museum's collection.

Today's masterpiece is the haunting Sunday Afternoon, by Hughie Lee-Smith.

Growing up, Lee-Smith spent time in Atlanta with his grandmother until settling in Cleveland with his musician mother. He attended Cleveland's East Technical High School, where he ran track and developed a love of the visual and performing arts.

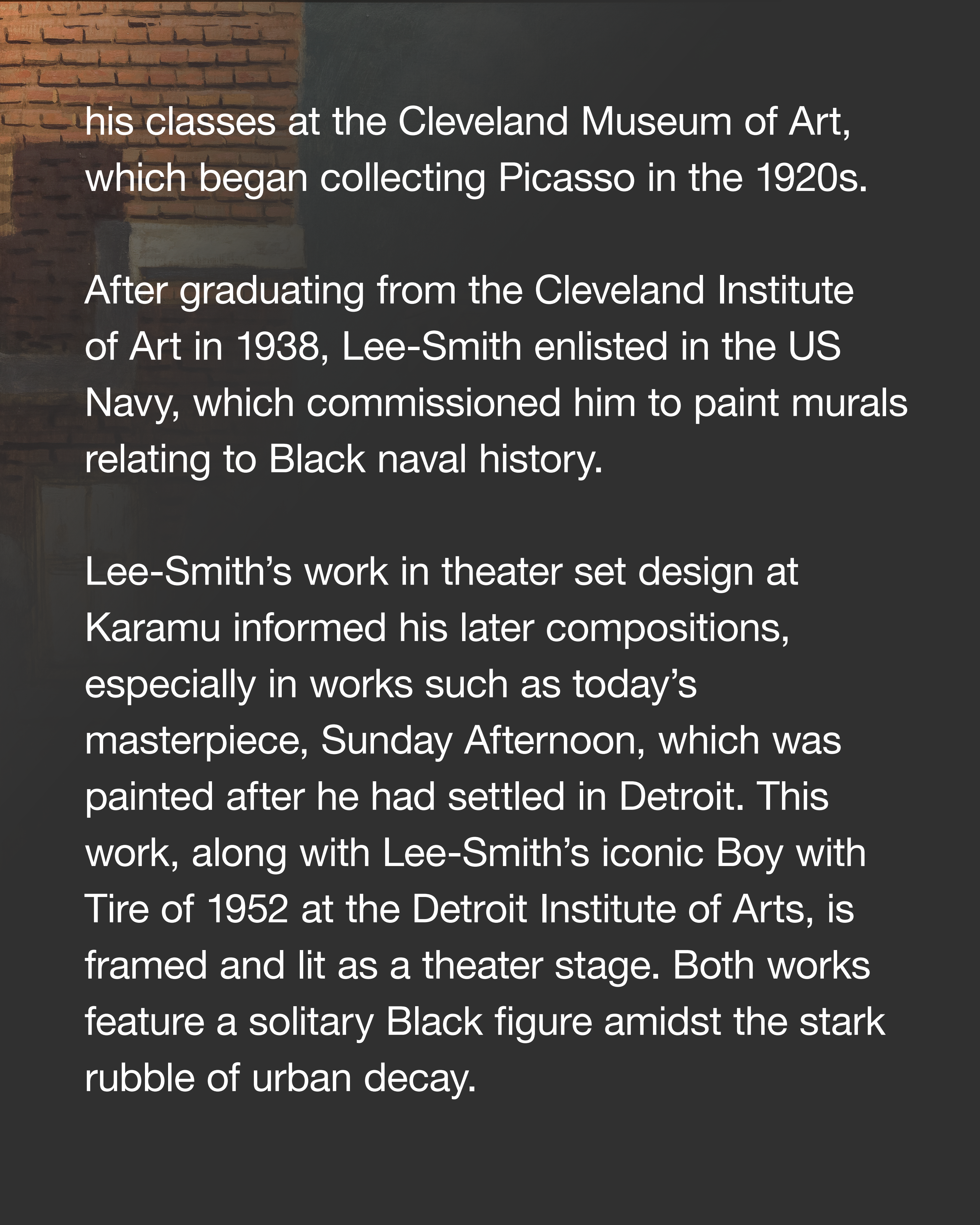




While his East Tech teammate, Jesse Owens, broke down racial barriers in sports winning four gold medals at the 1936 Olympics in Nazi Germany, Lee-Smith was waging his own battle for civil rights through his art. During the 1930s, he taught and performed at Karamu House, the nation's first African American theater and arts center. His experience at Karamu proved instrumental; he painted murals and created theatrical set designs, winning the financial support of the New Deal government-sponsored Works Progress Administration, or WPA, Federal Art Project.

A dedicated scholar of art history, Lee-Smith began to immerse himself in the work of Giorgio de Chirico and Pablo Picasso during



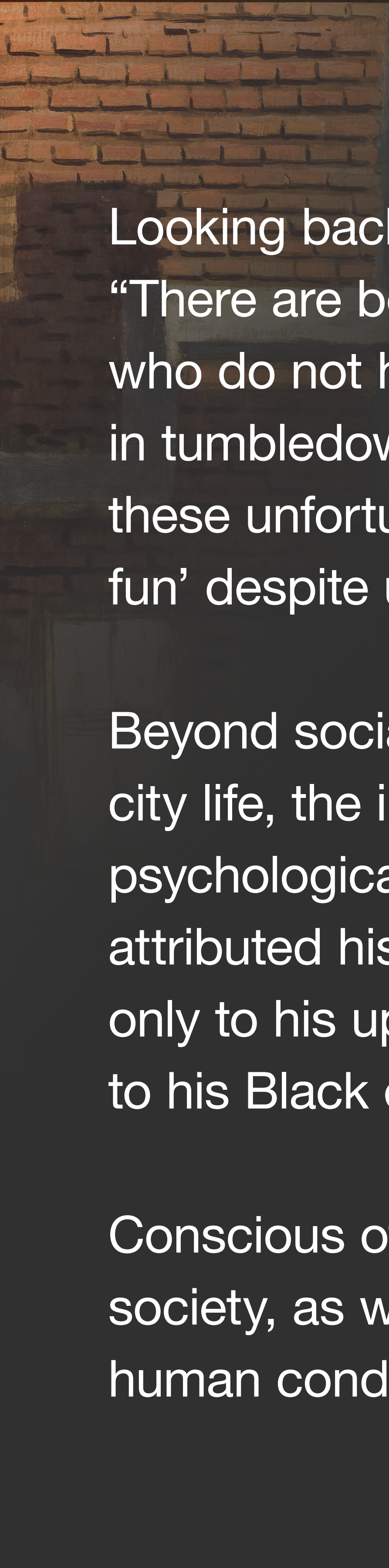
The background of the text is a painting. On the left, there is a section of a brick wall with reddish-brown bricks. To the right of the bricks, the background transitions into a dark, almost black, textured area that resembles a shadow or a deep crevice in a wall.

his classes at the Cleveland Museum of Art, which began collecting Picasso in the 1920s.

After graduating from the Cleveland Institute of Art in 1938, Lee-Smith enlisted in the US Navy, which commissioned him to paint murals relating to Black naval history.

Lee-Smith's work in theater set design at Karamu informed his later compositions, especially in works such as today's masterpiece, *Sunday Afternoon*, which was painted after he had settled in Detroit. This work, along with Lee-Smith's iconic *Boy with Tire* of 1952 at the Detroit Institute of Arts, is framed and lit as a theater stage. Both works feature a solitary Black figure amidst the stark rubble of urban decay.



A photograph of a brick wall on the left and a dark, shadowed doorway or passage on the right, serving as a background for the text.

Looking back on these times, Lee-Smith wrote  
“There are boys and girls all over our country  
who do not have nice clothes to wear and live  
in tumbledown neighborhoods. Nevertheless,  
these unfortunate children find ways to ‘have  
fun’ despite ugly surroundings.”

Beyond social commentary of American  
city life, the images are profound in their  
psychological insight. Lee-Smith himself  
attributed his understanding of isolation not  
only to his upbringing as an only child, but also  
to his Black experience.

Conscious of racial inequities in American  
society, as well as the complexities of the  
human condition, Hughie Lee-Smith imbued



his paintings with a beauty that is both haunting and redemptive.

He was elected to the National Academy of Design in 1963, the first Black academician since Henry Ossawa Tanner's election in 1910.

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



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