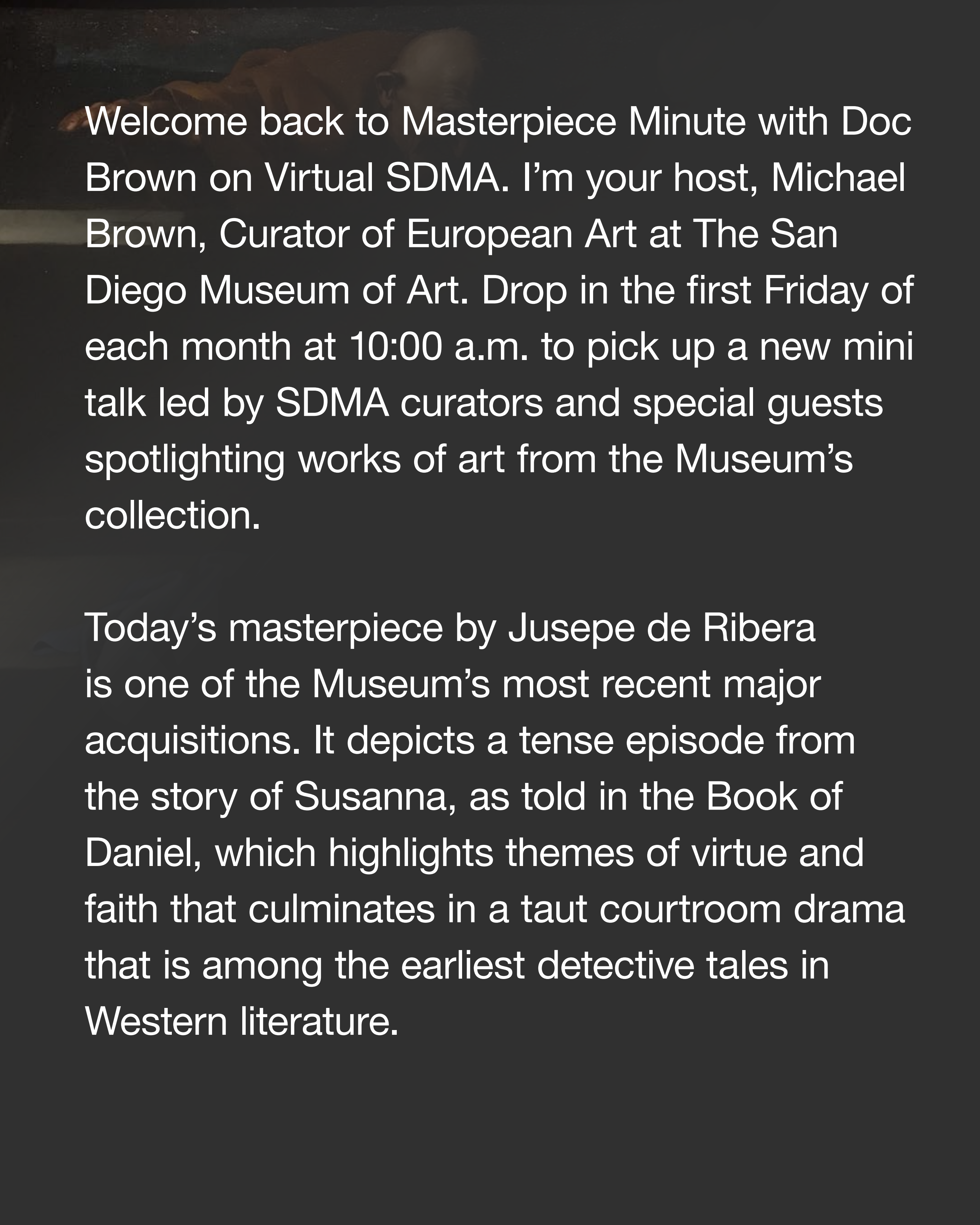


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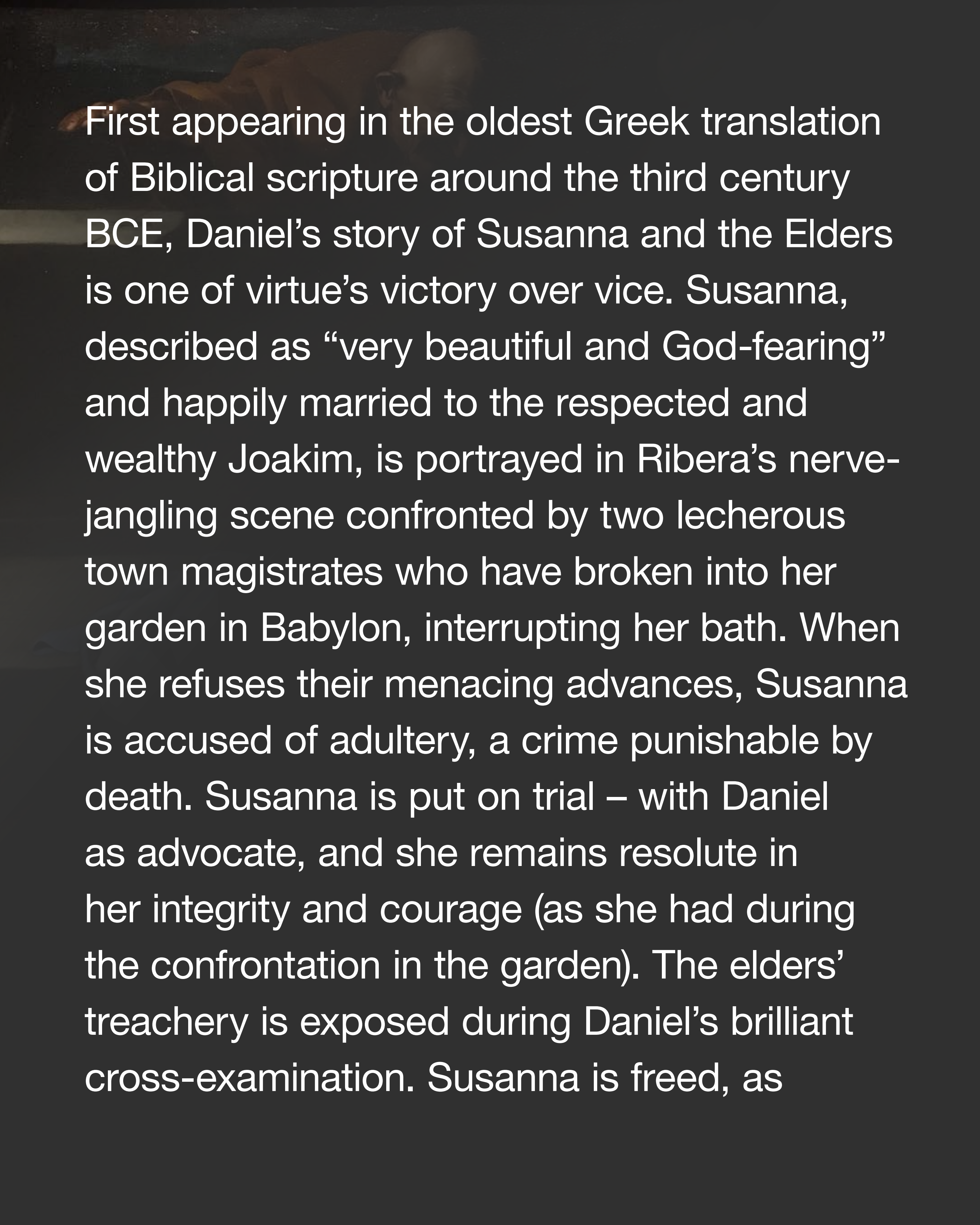
MASTERPIECE
MINUTE



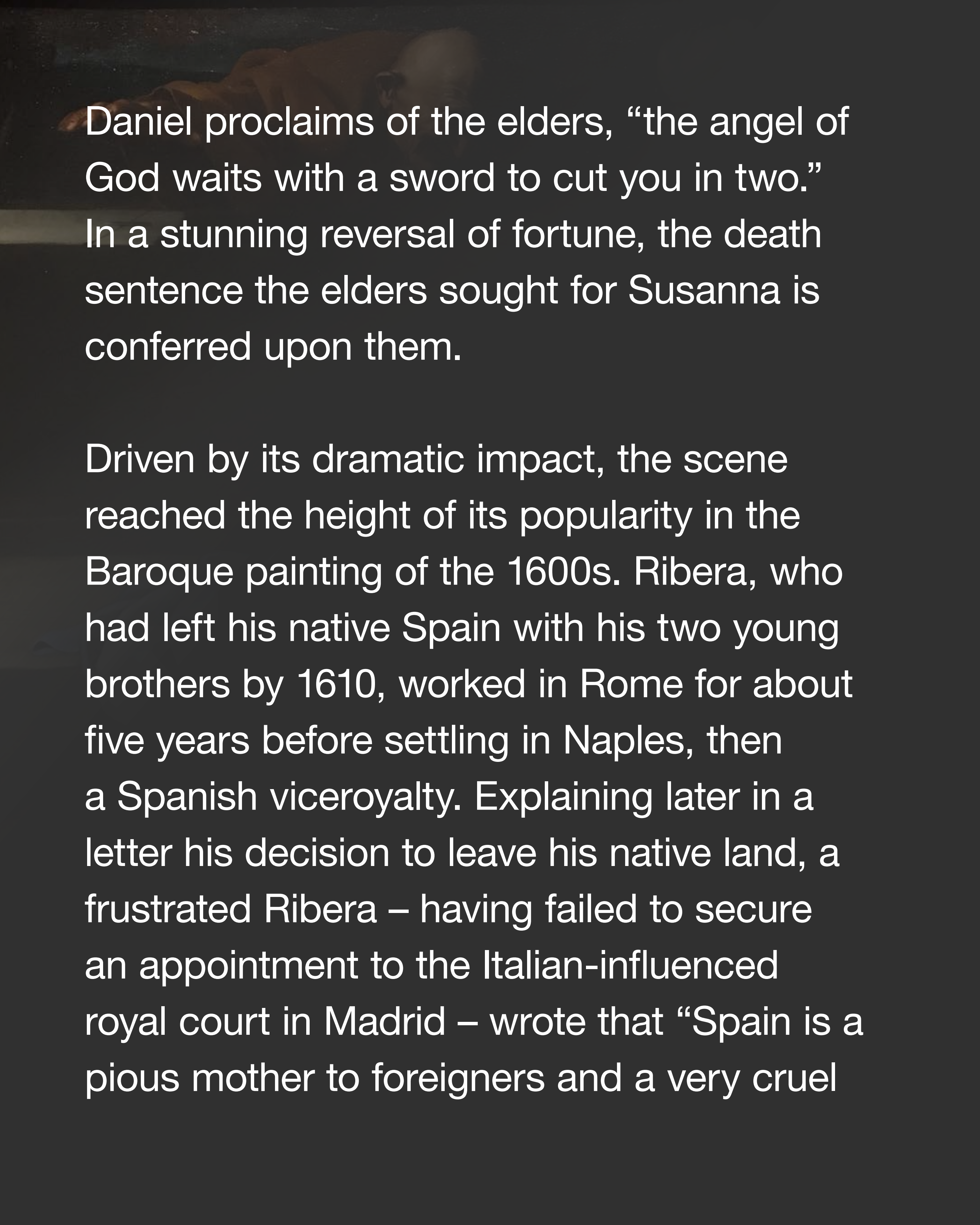


Welcome back to Masterpiece Minute with Doc Brown on Virtual SDMA. I'm your host, Michael Brown, Curator of European Art at The San Diego Museum of Art. Drop in the first Friday of each month at 10:00 a.m. to pick up a new mini talk led by SDMA curators and special guests spotlighting works of art from the Museum's collection.

Today's masterpiece by Jusepe de Ribera is one of the Museum's most recent major acquisitions. It depicts a tense episode from the story of Susanna, as told in the Book of Daniel, which highlights themes of virtue and faith that culminates in a taut courtroom drama that is among the earliest detective tales in Western literature.



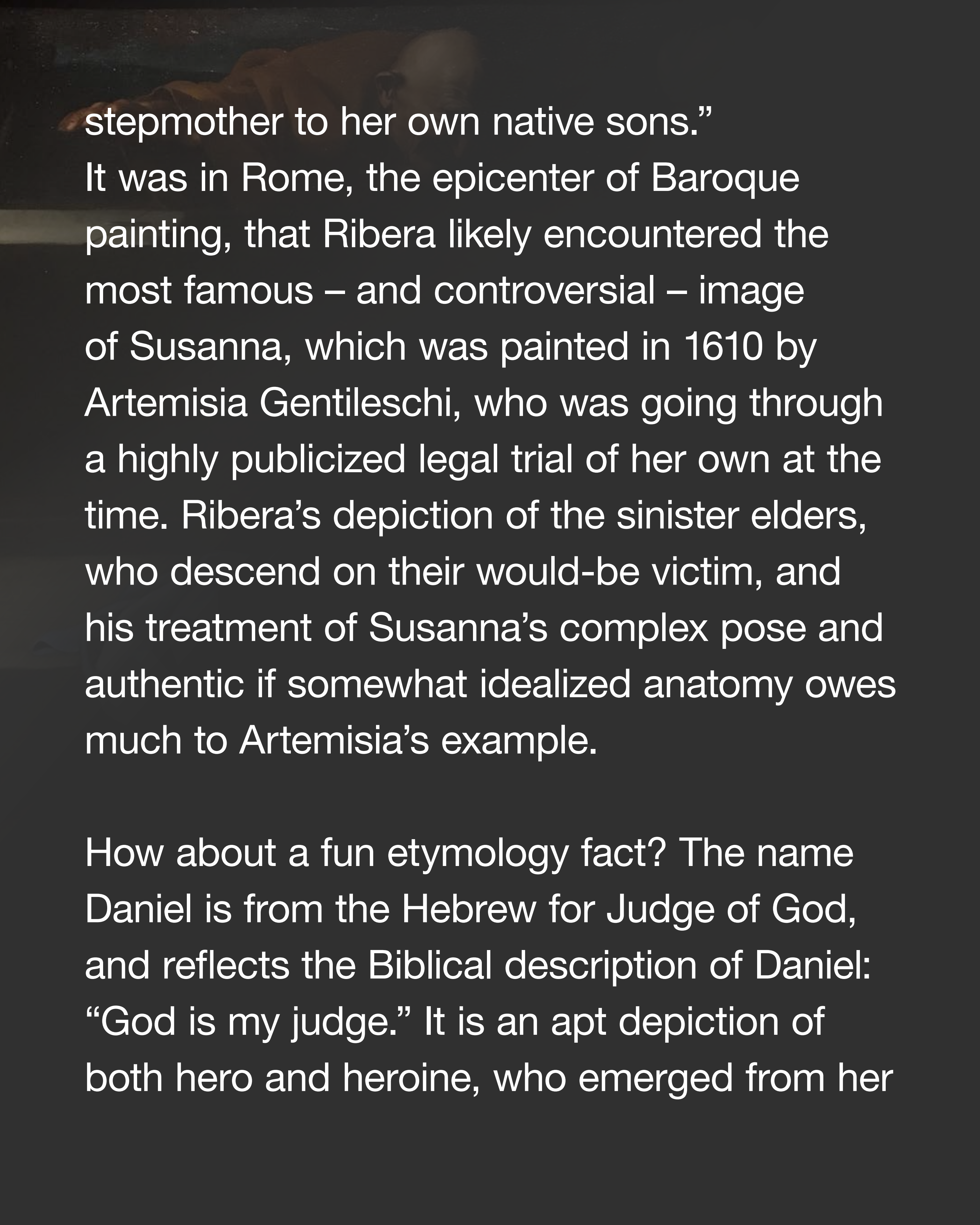
First appearing in the oldest Greek translation of Biblical scripture around the third century BCE, Daniel's story of Susanna and the Elders is one of virtue's victory over vice. Susanna, described as "very beautiful and God-fearing" and happily married to the respected and wealthy Joakim, is portrayed in Ribera's nerve-jangling scene confronted by two lecherous town magistrates who have broken into her garden in Babylon, interrupting her bath. When she refuses their menacing advances, Susanna is accused of adultery, a crime punishable by death. Susanna is put on trial – with Daniel as advocate, and she remains resolute in her integrity and courage (as she had during the confrontation in the garden). The elders' treachery is exposed during Daniel's brilliant cross-examination. Susanna is freed, as



Daniel proclaims of the elders, “the angel of God waits with a sword to cut you in two.”

In a stunning reversal of fortune, the death sentence the elders sought for Susanna is conferred upon them.

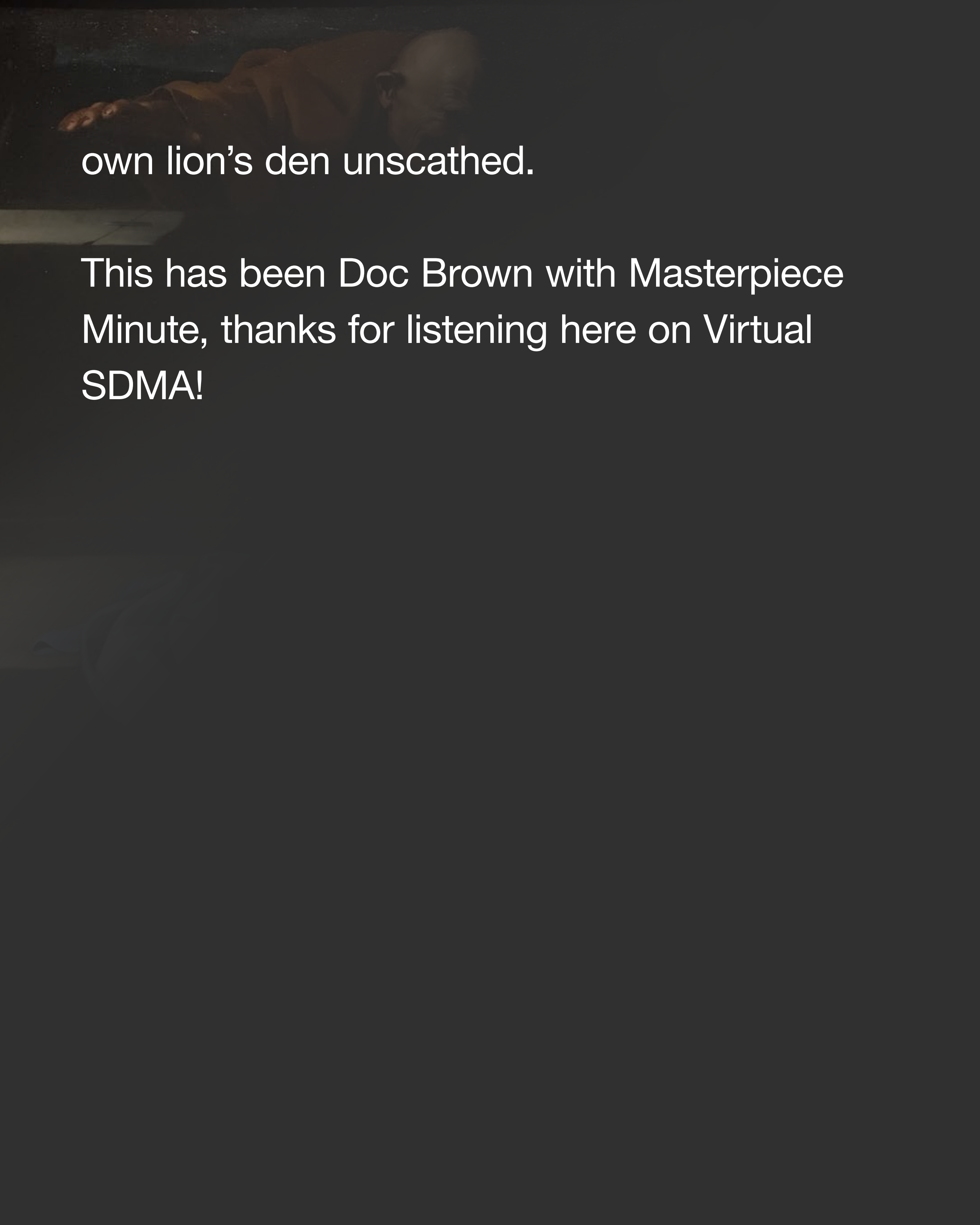
Driven by its dramatic impact, the scene reached the height of its popularity in the Baroque painting of the 1600s. Ribera, who had left his native Spain with his two young brothers by 1610, worked in Rome for about five years before settling in Naples, then a Spanish viceroyalty. Explaining later in a letter his decision to leave his native land, a frustrated Ribera – having failed to secure an appointment to the Italian-influenced royal court in Madrid – wrote that “Spain is a pious mother to foreigners and a very cruel



stepmother to her own native sons.”

It was in Rome, the epicenter of Baroque painting, that Ribera likely encountered the most famous – and controversial – image of Susanna, which was painted in 1610 by Artemisia Gentileschi, who was going through a highly publicized legal trial of her own at the time. Ribera’s depiction of the sinister elders, who descend on their would-be victim, and his treatment of Susanna’s complex pose and authentic if somewhat idealized anatomy owes much to Artemisia’s example.

How about a fun etymology fact? The name Daniel is from the Hebrew for Judge of God, and reflects the Biblical description of Daniel: “God is my judge.” It is an apt depiction of both hero and heroine, who emerged from her



own lion's den unscathed.

This has been Doc Brown with Masterpiece
Minute, thanks for listening here on Virtual
SDMA!



Today's masterpiece: Jusepe de Ribera (AKA Lo Spagnoletto), *Susanna and the Elders*, 1610-1612. Oil on canvas. Museum purchase, 2021.51.

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