History of Painting Portraits

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► For as long as there has been painting, there has been portraiture. Portrait paintings date back to at least 5,000 years ago to ancient Egypt, where the art form is said to have originated (although many other ancient peoples also practiced portrait artistry). Portraits are defined by the Tate Modern museum as simply a "representation of a specific person". Paintings are not the only way artists can create portraits. Sculptures, photos and drawings are also considered portraits as long as the art aims to depict the expression, likeness or mood of a particular person.
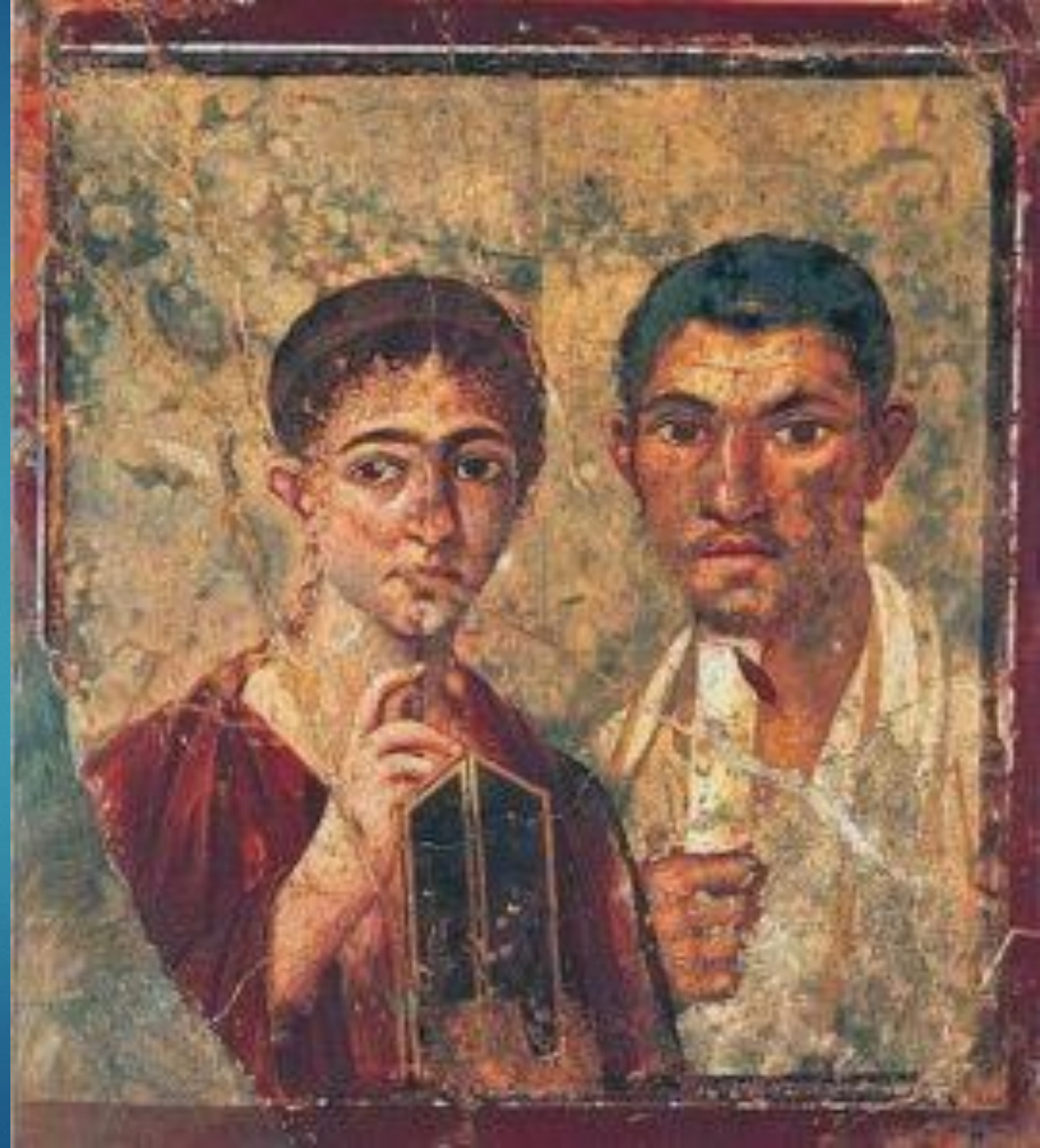
Portraits
2144-2124 BC

▶ Some of the earliest known portraits are called the "Statues of Gudea". 28 of these little statues remain and are considered portraiture because they all have similar features which appear to be representative of and unique to Gudea - a powerful ruler of ancient Lagash.

Portraits 55-79 AD

▶ Ancient portrait murals from Pompeii have been well-preserved for almost 2000 years by lava and ashes. One of the most famous is titled "Terentius Neo and his wife". He holds a scroll and her a tablet - originally thought to be indicative of their status andeducation.

Portraits 985 AD

► During the renaissance and middle ages, portrait artistry began to take on a new form. Rather than highly realistic features of their subjects, artists of this time tended to create portraits with stereotypical facial expressions, flat backgrounds, and a lack of realism
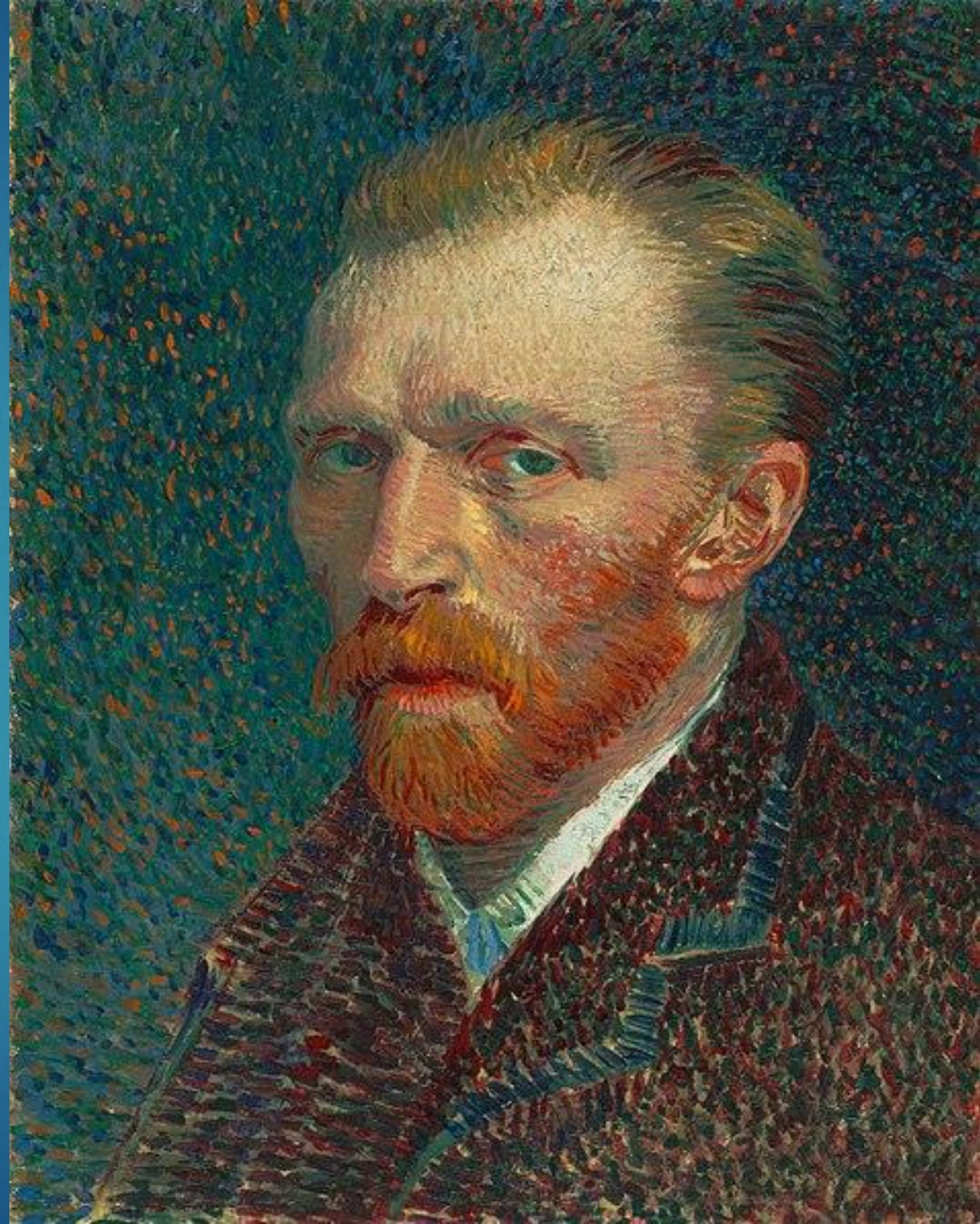
Portraits
1503 AD

▶ In 1503 AD, Leonardo da Vinci created perhaps the most iconic portrait of modern art history: the Mona Lisa. Da Vinci used a different technique than many other painters of this time. Instead of hard and very realistic lines, da Vinci used soft and blended brush strokes. While the Mona Lisa is an incredible painting with her playful smirk and expressive eyes, this painting probably got most of its notability due to its infamous theft in 1911. During this era, only the wealthy, powerful, and those with status could afford a portrait painting. Paints and canvas were hard to come by, and had to be made by apprentices in a studio.

Portraits
Mid to Late 1800s

▶ With the Industrial Revolution came mass production of art supplies. This meant that for the first time, middle class families could afford to purchase supplies and learn to paint. Notable French painters such as Gustave Courbet and Honoré Daumier were part of the Social Realism movement, and for the first time depicted portraits of the middle and working classes at the time. This is also the time when the Impressionists and Post Impressionists began questioning the nature of portrait artistry, and pushing their artistic boundaries.

- Perhaps the two most revolutionary artists of this period were Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Gauguin. Both created portraits in the late 1800's that were shockingly different than any portraits that had been created up until this time (craftsy.com).

The end