

SANTE CREARA

(Verona c.1572 - Verona c.1620)

The Flagellation

oil on slate
29.5 x 24.2 cm (11⅞ x 9½ in)

Provenance: Private European Collection.

S ANTE CREARA'S RENDITION OF *THE FLAGELLATION* shows his masterful handling of *chiaroscuro*. Central to the composition, Christ's body radiates a crisp, white light while on either side of him, encased in darkness, two servants of Pontius Pilate administer the lashes. To the right a male figure wields a whipping device; the straps, caught mid-air, subtly catch the light emanating from the figure of Christ. Standing to the right of Christ another tormentor grips a bundle of birch sticks menacingly with both hands. At the foot of Christ a sensually dressed female figure, her left breast slightly exposed, kneels while holding a burning torch; apparently to provide light for the two persecutors to carry out their violent task. In the bottom-right corner, the crown of thorns worn by Christ before his crucifixion is visible. Creara may have included this symbolic item to allude to the following scene in the Passion of Christ.

The Flagellation of Christ was a particularly popular subject in sixteenth and seventeenth-century religious painting. As part of the Passion cycle, it depicts the moment when Christ, at the request of



Caravaggio, *The Flagellation of Christ*, 1607,
Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples (Figure 2)

Pontius Pilate, is flogged before his crucifixion. Unusually, the present work does not depict Christ tied to a column during his ordeal, an item which is often included in artistic representations of this scene.

The subtle use of light within darkness by Creara shows clear links to the master of *chiaroscuro*, the contemporary artist Caravaggio (1571-1610), as well as to the work of Creara's teacher, Felice Riccio (1542-1605), known as *il Brusasorci* (fig.1). This use of *chiaroscuro* became a popular effect during the sixteenth century, in both Mannerist and in Baroque art. Artists such as Jacopo Tintoretto (1519-1594) and Paolo Veronese (1528-1588) chose this effect to exaggerate and emphasise divine light radiating from reverential subjects, such as in *The Flagellation*. Dark subjects dramatically lit by a shaft of light from a single source was a compositional device developed by, amongst others, Caravaggio who was seminal in developing the style of tenebrism where dramatic *chiaroscuro* would become a dominant stylistic device. Figure 2 shows Caravaggio's interpretation of the same subject matter executed in 1607.¹



Felice Riccio, *St Margaret of Antioch*, Private Collection (Figure 1)

¹ Caravaggio also painted another version of the Flagellation of Christ in 1607, *Christ at the Column*; now in the Musée des Beaux Arts, Rouen.

