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**Ippolito Scarsella, called Scarsellino**

*Virgin and child in a landscape*

IPPOLITO SCARSELLA, CALLED SCARSELLINO
(Ferrara, c. 1550 – 1620)

*VIRGIN AND CHILD IN A LANDSCAPE*

Oil on paper, laid down on panel
13.5 x 8.8 cm;
5 3/10 x 3 7/16 in.

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**Provenance**

Private collection

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**Literature**

Unpublished

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Ippolito Scarsella, called Scarsellino, was born and worked in Ferrara, where he became one of the leading painters active between the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.[1] According to the early sources, after training with his father, Sigismondo Scarsella, he spent three years in Venice, where he frequented the workshop of Paolo Veronese and studied the works of Titian, Tintoretto, Andrea Schiavone, and the Bassano family. This Venetian experience remained fundamental to his development, earning him the sobriquet "the Paolo of Ferrara".[2] Celebrated by his contemporaries for the fertility of his invention and the speed and delicacy of his handling, Scarsellino was equally accomplished in pagan and sacred narratives, displaying a particular gift for intimate scenes of affection and, especially, compositions of the Virgin and Child, often rooted in the Emilian and Venetian pictorial traditions of the sixteenth century.[3]

The rediscovery of this small oil on paper constitutes a new addition to Scarsellino's corpus. The unusual support establishes a further material link with Venetian artistic culture, where oil on paper was already widely employed. Its use here reinforces Scarsellino's connection with the pictorial world of Veronese, Tintoretto, and their circles, which played a decisive role in the formation of his style.

The attribution of the present work to Scarsellino was first proposed by David Ekserdjian, who also suggested that the composition may derive from, or at least reflect knowledge of, Franciabigio's *Madonna and Child* in the Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna (fig. 1). The comparison is particularly suggestive in the unusual standing pose of the Christ Child, which recurs in the present work.[4] Scarsellino's oeuvre includes numerous small-scale
compositions of the Holy Family, a genre for which he appears to have been particularly admired. A direct comparison may be made with the small *Madonna and Child with Saint Joseph and the Young Saint John the Baptist* in the Galleria Borghese, probably identifiable with a painting formerly in the collection of Lucrezia d'Este, Duchess of Urbino. Beyond their intimate dimensions, the two works share an emphasis on the tender exchange between the Virgin and Child, reflecting the artist's distinctive contribution to the contemporary *pittura degli affetti*.[5] Also comparable in scale and subject is *The Virgin and Child with the Infant Saint John* at Burghley House, a small oil on canvas measuring only 25 × 22 cm. Its concentrated arrangement of the sacred figures further demonstrates Scarsellino's ability to adapt this devotional subject to a format intended for intimate contemplation.

[1] Novelli 2008; Lapierre 2018, *ad vocem*.
[2] Bentini 1993, pp. 255-273.
[3] Lapierre 2013, pp. 41-47.
[4] Bentini et al. 2006, vol. 2, p. 93, cat. 131.
[5] Scanu 2022.

The material structure and palette of the painting were investigated in 2025 by Steven Saverwyns at the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA), Brussels, through non-invasive macro-X-ray fluorescence (MA-XRF) scanning, complemented by visible-light, raking-light, ultraviolet, and infrared photography. The infrared image makes the dark linear handling of the surrounding vegetation and foreground more legible (see fig. 2). Elemental mapping indicates a calcium-rich ground beneath the paint, consistent with chalk or gypsum, which MA-XRF cannot distinguish. Lead white predominates in the lighter passages and is mixed with vermilion in the flesh tones; ultraviolet fluorescence suggests an organic red lake in the Virgin's purple dress, alongside vermilion. Iron-rich earth pigments contribute to the hair and shadows, while the dark background probably combines ochre with bone black. The detection of lead and antimony identifies Naples yellow in the yellowish passage above the Virgin's head and suggests its admixture with blue in the green beside the Child.[6]

While the compositional model is more generally typical of Renaissance practice, the execution of the present work is unmistakably Venetian in inspiration. The richly worked, almost impasted handling of colour and form, together with the luminous opening onto the landscape, recalls the Venetian tradition of the Virgin and Child. At the same time, the softened forms and intimate character of the figures preserve a connection with Emilian, and particularly Parmigianesque, painting of the first half of the sixteenth century.

[6] Saverwyns 2025, pp. 4-11; annex 1, p. 14. The blue pigment itself remains unidentified; zinc is chiefly associated with the grain of the wooden support, although some may occur as an impurity in earth pigments; chromium, barium, and cobalt are attributed to later retouching along the margins, where some losses of colour have been registered.



Fig. 1. Franciabigio, *Madonna and Child,* 1510–1513, oil on panel, 89 x 69 cm, Bologna, Pinacoteca Nazionale, inv. 547.




Fig 2. Scarsellino, *The Virgin and Child in a Landscape,* infrared photograph. Photograph: Stéphane Bazzo, © KIKI-IRPA

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