Welcome to the Hirsch Library. We trust that you have selected the object you wish to write about, and will spend a good deal of time looking at the object first-hand. The cultural backgrounds and descriptions in books and journals will be far more helpful if you absorb such material already having begun looking at the panel on the second floor of the Beck Building.

Below are some suggestions for reading on the Late Mediæval/Northern Renaissance art, about the medium and technique of panel painting, and about the “subject” of the picture. By describing the subject matter, and the technique the artist used, you should be able to come up with your assessment of the content—that is, the meaning, or the “soul” of the work. Note how much of the language and thinking about painting around 1500 has been defined in terms of (and in favor of) the Italian artists. You may wish to read about similar pictures by the same artist (e.g. in the Huntington Library & Museum), or other depictions of the Madonna and Child. What follows below is hardly a comprehensive list, even in English. We welcome your own suggestions of titles to add to the library, and how to improve this list, so please let us know what you find most helpful!

“Reference” books you will find in the main floor reading room, and “Ready reference” behind the information desk. For items from the main stacks, please jot down the titles and call numbers, and the library staff will retrieve them for you. If you need help with terms & techniques, symbols, or abbreviations, please ask. Librarians can show you how to “browse” our holdings using the catalog.

For clarification on distinctions between the terms “Netherlandish,” “Flemish,” “Burgundian” and “Belgian,” or “ca,” please ask at the reference desk.

General Reading on Netherlandish Art

“The Renaissance Outside of Italy” in Gardner’s Art through the Ages, p. 707

N 5300 .H68 1999

Stockstad, Art History, p. 619 on Flemish panel painting.
N 5300 .S63 1997

Snyder, Northern Renaissance Art. Chapter 6.
N 6370 .S6 1985

“Late Gothic,” in Janson’s History of Art, Chapter 15.

Craig Harbison. Mirror of the Artist: Northern Ren. Art in Its Historical Context.
N 6370 .H26 1995

Stechow, ed. Northern Renaissance Art, 1400-1600: Source & Documents.
N 6370 .N67 1989


Dunkerton. Giotto to Dürer: Early Renaissance Painting in the Nat’l Gallery
ND 170 .N37 1991

Verdon. Christianity and the Renaissance.
N 7956 .A1 C47 1990

CB 361 .C85 1993 Ref.
Passages specifically on the Houston Madonna

Erwin Panofsky. Early Netherlandish Painting, vol. 1, p. 296-298.  ND 635.P35 1953

On Rogier van der Weyden

Rogier van der Weyden/Rogier de le pasture: Official Painter to the City of Brussels, Portrait Painter of the Burgundian Court.  ND 673.W4 1979
Max Friedländer. Van Eyck to Bruegel. vol. 1, p. 16-25.  ND 635.F713 1969
Library Ephemera File on Rogier van der Weyden.  Files – “Weyden”

Technique, Iconography, Theory, Society, and the Function of Altarpieces

Cennino Cennini. The Craftsman’s Handbook.  ND 1130.C3822
Northern Renaissance Paintings: The Discovery of Invention.  N 729.A3 FILE
Gertrud Schiller. Iconography of Christian Art. (section on Mary typology)  N 7830.S35132
J. Pelikan. Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture.  BT 610.P45 1996
Ellington. From Sacred Body to Angelic Soul: Understanding Mary …  N8070.E44 2001

Web sites are usually a misfortunate diversion in this area, but you might check:

witcombe.sbc.edu/ARTHmedieval.html#LateGothic (Recommended by The Fogg Art Museum on its own “Investigating the Renaissance” page)

To track down articles in journals, use the Wilson Art Index, the Bibliography of the History of Art, and leads you gain from citations in your reading. You could browse exhibition catalogs, or books about the holdings of other museums: the entries written about similar objects could help you to look and think, and provide examples of how to write about art. To find books, use keywords in the on-line catalog. Once you zero-in on titles you like, pay attention to how those items are cataloged, and use their subject headings to find similar books. Use the bibliographies of books and articles to find other sources.

For guidelines about writing it may be helpful to look at Sylvan Barnet’s A Short Guide to Writing about Art, which includes tips for looking, reading, and writing about art. Ask for it at the reference desk.

At every stage of your work, please allow the library staff to help you. The Library phone number is 713-639-7325.