UNDERDRAWING IN PAINTINGS OF
THE ROGIER VAN DER WEYDEN
AND MASTER OF FLÉMALLE GROUPS
Introduction

The English edition of Max J. Friedländer’s *Die altniederländische Malerei*, volume 2 of 1967, lists 25 paintings attributed directly to the Master of Flémalle and 61 to Rogier van der Weyden. None of these paintings is signed, and only one is dated. There are just two paintings in the Van der Weyden Group which are usually considered to be authenticated by inventories later than 1550,1 namely the Prado *Descent from the Cross* and the Escorial *Crucifixion*. The Master of Flémalle received his acquired name as the postulated author of panels allegedly from the abbey of Flémalle near Liège.2 He was later equated with Robert Campin, a painter active in Tournai.3 None of the paintings assigned to him is documented, and only one – the *Werl Shutter* in the Prado – is dated.

The documentary evidence on Rogier van der Weyden is also rather scanty,4 and the basis for attribution small. The relation between the two painters has been hotly debated in the art-historical literature, and culminated in the early 1930s when Renders classed the paintings of the Master of Flémalle Group as the early work of Rogier van der Weyden. It is not surprising, then, that with attribution and dating depending so much upon subjective style criticism of the painted surfaces, an attempt should be made to discover how underdrawings hidden beneath the paint layers related to these scholarly opinions. Some of the earliest applications of infrared reflectography – a method developed by one of the authors – had already been directed towards revealing underdrawings in paintings from the Rogier van der Weyden Group.5 Since many extant pictures in the Van der Weyden/Flémalle groups are among the most beautiful early Netherlandish paintings in existence, the desire for a more complete examination of their underdrawings was not easily or rapidly quenched. This is perhaps illustrated by the fact that this book is being published more than 25 years after the first reflectograms of the Hague *Lamentation* were taken in 1966.

A survey of earlier technical studies of early Netherlandish paintings

Technical studies of early Netherlandish paintings have usually been conducted in connection with restoration work, but only a fraction of the data thus collected has been published and made available to art historians. There are studies, for instance, on the Van Eyck *Ghent Altarpiece*,6 and on some other Eyckian paintings,7 on several outstanding works in the Dieric Bouts Group,8 on a number of Memlinc Group pictures,9 on Justus van Ghent,10 on some panels by Gerard David,11 and on a number of paintings attributed to masters with acquired names.12 Several methods of scientific examination were usually deployed in these investigations.

Wolters discussed X-radiographs of a number of early Flemish paintings with a more art-historical purpose,13 and Burroughs also commented on such radiographs.14 Taubert analysed stylistic differences in the under-