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Autor: Bayer, Andrea; M. Cristina Rodeschini

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The Accademia Carrara of Bergamo is one of Italy's premier paintings galleries but remains too little known outside the country. The temporary closure and restoration of its galleries, housed in a grand neoclassical building in the North Italian city of Bergamo, has made possible a welcome collaboration with The Metropolitan Museum of Art, bringing to New York fifteen of the Carrara's masterpieces by Venetian and North Italian painters of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, including Giovanni Bellini's haunting Pietà with the Virgin and Saint John, the predella panels from Lorenzo Lotto's celebrated Martinengo Altarpiece, and Orpheus and Eurydice, an ambitious composition from Titian's early career.

The exhibition and accompanying publication illuminate not only the quality of the Accademia Carrara's holdings but also the unique position the museum occupies in the history of art, collecting, and connoisseurship in the northern Italian regions of Lombardy and the Veneto. As the custodian of three superlative, formerly private collections—those of the Bergamo native Count Giacomo Carrara (1714-1796), who founded the institution in the late eighteenth century, Guglielmo Lochis (1789-1859), and the great connoisseur Giovanni Morelli (1826-1891)—the Accademia Carrara has served to transform the collecting practices and artistic pursuits of three individuals into a reflection of the cultural history of Bergamo, a civic-minded vision whose influence extends far beyond the city's borders.