



**Italian School, circa 1660**

**A Lady, possibly dressed in the guise of Flora, flowers in her curled hair, pearl earrings and pearl and gold necklace**

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*Oil on copper*

Oval, 65mm (2 1/2in) high

This young woman, with flowers in her hair, is likely dressed as Flora, Goddess of Flowers. A theme used by many artists over the previous two centuries - including Bartolomeo Veneto's 1520s portrait of a lady, possibly Lucrezia Borgio (now in the Staedelmuseum) or, earlier, Sandro Botticelli's *La Primavera* (c.1477-1490). The present sitter's hairstyle, with her hair in distinctive wired ringlets, recalls that of Catherine of Braganza's, adapted to this fashionable style after her Portuguese fashions were widely ridiculed.

Although clearly wealthy and wearing large pearl earrings and a gold necklace, the addition of flowers in the woman's hair suggest that she is associating with the Roman goddess Flora. The youth of the sitter matches the connection with flowers, fertility, and youth. This is likely a marriage or betrothal portrait, intended to anticipate the happy arrival of many children. The sitter's slight smile is inviting and relaxed.

Technically the work compares well to known works by Elisabetta Sirani of Bologna (1638–1665) [1]. She was the daughter of the established Bolognese artist and art merchant, Giovanni Andrea Sirani (1610–1670) and Margherita Masini della Mano. Sirani, one of the best art professors and appraisers in the city, trained Elisabetta in painting, drawing, and printmaking, with a solid grounding also in art theory. Like many women artists, Sirani painted on copper, producing more intimate works for friends and family, as well as paying patrons.

[1] A book devoted to the artist was published in 2023 by Adelina Modesti, titled Elisabetta Sirani (Lund Humphries).