

ADELE GRAF

ON SEEING PICASSO'S "WOMAN IN A HAT WITH FLOWERS"

when I was one week old, Picasso painted my life—
its untainted canvas white
to heighten my colours as they emerged

his cubist perspective recast
my young self after my father's death
and my mother's collapse to mourning

he striped my dress with white and gold
but raised its pointed neckline high
to constrict my throat and mute my voice

he detached my right arm from my shoulder
since he knew that loss would unhinge
and strand me from support

I'd seethe long before love softened me
so my black hair defines red triangles—
fierce pigment for my mother's grief

he moved my white mouth to my cheek
when he saw my face skewed in stress
with no parents to shield me

then he named his work for my milliner
grandmother, whose warmth healed me
as if she'd sewn his flowers on my hat's mid-brim

her joy and his painting outlast fleshed hands –
she joins her contemporary Picasso
to shape my glad red hat

[oil on canvas, dated March 6, 1944]