Poetry
Unsanctioned
by Willa Schneberg
Unsanctioned

Like any grand manor's garden this institution has a topiary--kangaroos, elephants and turtles, but we are the real animals, jezebels, segregated from male patients.

Dr. Gray calls himself "Our Protector."

In this bucolic setting, safe from noxious vapors we are instructed to dance virtuously, recite poems that will not excite, and become ladies again, as if we ever were.

Tourists picnic on the manicured grounds to stare, feel self-righteous, leave contented, and certain that we aren't contagious.

We hide scraps of purloined butcher paper and writing implements in our corsets, limn depravity, and godlessness on rags inside our thighs and behind mirrors.

We are the women relieved our children are born dead.

In the wards at night, if we pace or scream, we are tied to our beds, and matrons shut our mouths with their palms until we blubber.

If Dr. Gray's minions could, they would tat scalloped edges around our death wishes, turn them into doilies, but sometimes our unsanctioned words have wings:

with pieces of chalk and pencil nubs we scratch green and yellow hot air balloons that lift us over the padlocks.

Willa Schneberg is a poet, essayist, visual artist, curator, and psychotherapist in private practice. She has authored five poetry collections including: Box Poems (Alice James Books); In The Margins of The World, recipient of the Oregon Book Award; Storytelling in Cambodia (Calyx Books), and her latest volume, Rending the Garment. Willa has read at the Library of Congress and has been a fellow at Yaddo and MacDowell. Her work has appeared in numerous anthologies and literary journals, including: American Poetry Review, Salmagundi, Poet Lore, Bellevue Literary Review, and Psychohistory Review. This January, her newest collection, The Naked Room, will be released from Broadstone Books.