

Simulacra

by Joani Reese

Men drag the last wild woman from her home, concealed above a verdigris-tipped sea. A gag secures her mouth; red thread sews closed labial folds. They cuff her hands behind her back and dangle golden keys from chains around their necks. They truck her over the pass to the flat lands, all colors muted green and gray. Pain curls her like a question mark as tamed women bend her bones into the cage where she complies, or dies.

Men blunt her claws, excise her teeth, attack until her mind succumbs. They dress her up; they dress her down. Her face is tattooed with a smile, her womb unlaced, perfectly numbed. She learns to kneel in darkness all her own. Each year evolves into the next. A zealous drab, she sates with sex; she gestates younger, pliant girls, then teaches each to ape a paper doll.

