Camouflaging the Chimera

By Yusef Komunyakaa

We tied branches to our helmets.
  We painted our faces & rifles
  with mud from a riverbank,

blades of grass hung from the pockets
  of our tiger suits. We wove
  ourselves into the terrain,
  content to be a hummingbird’s target.

We hugged bamboo & leaned
  against a breeze off the river,
  slow-dragging with ghosts

from Saigon to Bangkok,
  with women left in doorways
  reaching in from America.
  We aimed at dark-hearted songbirds.

In our way station of shadows
  rock apes tried to blow our cover,
  throwing stones at the sunset. Chameleons

crawled our spines, changing from day
  to night: green to gold,
  gold to black. But we waited
  till the moon touched metal,

till something almost broke
  inside us. VC struggled
  with the hillside, like black silk

wrestling iron through grass.
  We weren’t there. The river ran
  through our bones. Small animals took refuge
  against our bodies; we held our breath,

ready to spring the L-shaped
  ambush, as a world revolved
  under each man’s eyelid.
