

Least Concern

By John Shoptaw

Chimerical, the rhinoceros egret,
its keratin dehorned in South Africa
and container-shipped to Vietnam or China
where it's ground by aphrodisiasts
and snorted by affluent boneheads,

metamorphs into the hippopotamus egret,
the elephant, Cape buffalo, zebra, giraffe,
the ostrich, and the camel egret,
the deep-domed tortoise, and in the Americas
the cow heron or cattle egret.

Ranging like wildfire over the last century,
a migration prodded by the transmutation
of forests into ranches, the cattle egret
writhes and champs and tilts and plods
and darts in cursive at grasshoppers.

And where its livestock gets concentrated,
decapitated, tenderized, charred, whatever,
the *Bubulcus ibis* or cattleman wader,
capitalizing on a field without cattle,
reinvents itself as the tractor egret

though the unattached bird is emblem enough
of the other end of extinction, ignition,
when not just its shaggy breeding crest
and breast plumage go up in flame
but its legs, beak, lores, and irises catch color.