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.