



ARTS &
LETTERS

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Friends,

The art, music, words, and stories we celebrated and awarded in 2025 are all rooted in some way in Mississippi geography, imagination, or legacy. And they resonate through their connections to the present moment—through the perspectives of their creators. As our talented 2025 awardees prove, the arts are truly alive in Mississippi.

Thank you to the artists, storytellers, and patrons who interpret Mississippi culture and activate its creative potential, year after year, generation over generation.

Renew your membership or join today to help us continue this work.

Pete Halverson

President, Board of Governors



Music Composition (Contemporary)

Staples Jr. Singers, Aberdeen - *Searching*
Award Sponsor: Nan and Mike Sanders



Citation of Merit

Erin Austen Abbott, Water Valley - art shows,
The One Night Stand at the Ole Miss Motel



Youth Literature

Allen R. Wells, Alexandria, VA -
Danté Plays His Blues
Award Sponsor: Carol Tatum



Photography

Adam Shemper, Healdsburg, CA -
Light in These Hills: Oxford, Mississippi
Award Sponsor: Jean and Tim Medley



Visual Arts

Charlie Buckley, Oxford -
Mississippi Panorama
Award Sponsor: Ouida and Wayne Drinkwater



Special Achievement

Thad Lee, Oxford - for the film,
Two Lives in Photography



Music Composition (Classical)

John Wooton, Hattiesburg -
Suite Música del Corazón
Award Sponsor: Family of Keith Dockery McLean



Poetry

Jessica Fisher, Williamstown, MA - *Daywork*
Award Sponsor: Mary Thompson, Jenny Long, and Damian
Augsberger in honor of Samuel William Long



Fiction

Max Hipp, Oxford -
What Doesn't Kill You Opens Your Heart
Award Sponsor: The Mississippi Quarterly



The Noel Polk Lifetime Achievement Award

John F. Marszalek, Giles Distinguished Professor Emeritus, MS State University for his role
in the relocation of Grant's papers to the Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library at MSU
Award Sponsor: Catalina and Scott Polk, Jennifer and Michael Heidelberg



Life Writing

Julian Randall, Chicago, IL - *The Dead Don't Need Reminding:
In Search of Fugitives, Mississippi, and Black TV Nerd Sh*t*
Award Sponsor: Marian and Claiborne Barnwell



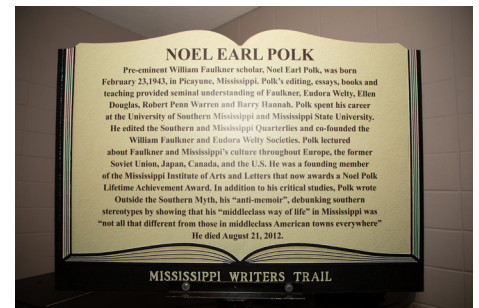
Nonfiction

Robert K. D. Colby, Oxford - *An Unholy Traffic: Slave Trading in the Civil War South*
Award Sponsor: George T. Shawhan, Margaret Anne and Jimmy Robbins in memory of Dorothy Shawhan

MIAL 2025 awards

IN JUNE, MIAL celebrated the cultural contributions of these twelve awardees at the 46th Annual MIAL Awards Weekend in Columbus, Mississippi.

Their words, music, visual language, and leadership are expressions of the state's vital and vibrant contemporary voice. We were also fortunate to join the family of the late Noel Polk to unveil a mock-up of a new Mississippi Writers Trail marker in his name; soon to make its permanent imprint on the physical landscape. Noel's work includes the definitive literary criticism on William Faulkner; in so many ways, he illuminated the complex and lasting resonance of Mississippi culture.



In MIAL's first year of awards in 1980, Noel gave an interview to the *Mississippi Enterprise* as the President of the MIAL Board of Governors, reiterating the critical role of artists in the state, saying that,

“... we believe that the formal appreciation of their constant enrichment of our lives will appeal to all Mississippians.”

He spoke for us all.



Reception at Rosenzweig Arts Center
Friday, June 13



Saturday morning architecture tour with architect and scholar Robert Ivy, MIAL Lifetime Achievement Award-winner (2018) and Columbus native.

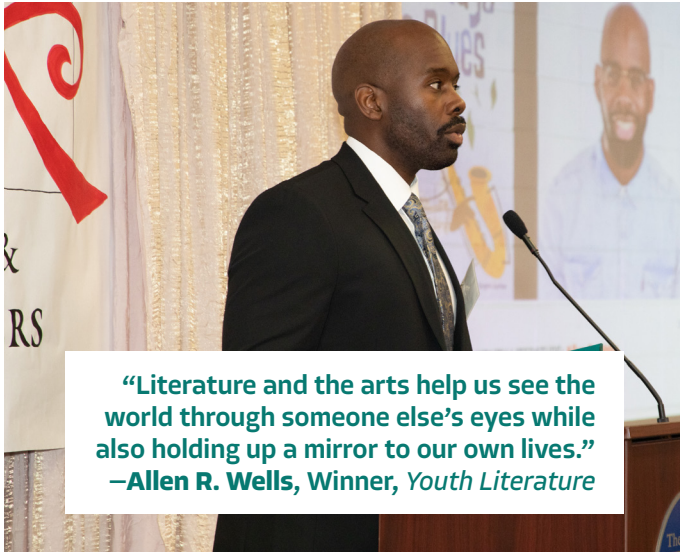


PHOTOS BY 2025 SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT WINNER THAD LEE



Readings and Signings by Award Winners,
Friendly City Books, Saturday, June 14





"Literature and the arts help us see the world through someone else's eyes while also holding up a mirror to our own lives."
—Allen R. Wells, Winner, Youth Literature



Awards created by Stephen Phillips of Crawford, MS



Awards banquet on the historic campus of The W (Mississippi University for Women), June 14



EVENT PHOTOS BY CHRIS JENKINS

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Mississippi Delta Community College, Moorhead
Mississippi Humanities Council, Jackson
Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson
Mississippi State University, Starkville
Mississippi Valley State University, Itta Bena
Mississippi University for Women, Columbus
Northwest Mississippi Community College, Senatobia
Pass Christian Books/Cat Island Coffeehouse, Pass Christian
Pearl River Community College, Poplarville
Rust College, Holly Springs
Square Books, Oxford

Tougaloo College, Tougaloo
University of Mississippi, Oxford
University of Mississippi Friends of the Library, Oxford
University of Mississippi Museum & Historic Houses, Oxford
University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg
University Press of Mississippi, Jackson
Walter Anderson Museum of Art, Ocean Springs

SUSTAINING MEMBERS

Cynthia and Jim Abbott, Oxford
Ivy and Frank Alley, Jackson
Ted Atkinson, West Point
Marian and Claiborne Barksdale, Oxford
DeeDee and George Bassi, Laurel
George Booth II, Tupelo
Betsy Bradley & Robert Langford, Jackson
Lee Cohen, College of Liberal Arts, University of Mississippi
Doyce and Bill Deas, Tupelo
Carol and George Evans, Madison
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In Memoriam:

Ann Abadie
Oxford

Lynn Gammill
Hattiesburg

Clarke Reed
Greenville

Lester Senter Wilson
Jackson

Swan Yerger
Fairhope, AL

NOMINATIONS FOR MIAL AWARDS 2026

The Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters invites its members to make award nominations to honor the artistic achievements of living Mississippians (current residents or former ones with continuing, significant ties to the state). Judges will consider only work shown, published, or performed in 2025. Members may nominate more than one individual in any category, and MIAL members may self-nominate. Please make additional copies of this form if needed. Nominations should include a complete address and e-mail (if applicable). Cookbooks, edited works, and self-published books will not be accepted for nomination. Similarly, images on personal websites and social media platforms are not eligible for nomination of the Visual Arts and Photography awards.

Deadline: Nominations must be postmarked on or before January 15, 2026.

Published books will be supplied, so it is not necessary to send books with your nomination.

Time to join or renew your membership! Be a champion for Mississippi art.
Begin or renew your membership when you nominate, via the form or at ms-arts-letters.org.

Categories:

FICTION (novel, short story collection, etc.)

LIFE WRITING

(biography, autobiography, memoir, and travel writing)

NONFICTION (research-based books, including academic studies, popular history, and journalism)

POETRY Eligible are up to 15 poems published individually or in a collection (some poems in the collection may have been published prior).

YOUTH LITERATURE

(writing or illustration)
Eligible are fiction or nonfiction works including picture books, chapter books, middle grade, and YA.

MUSIC COMPOSITION (CLASSICAL)

(song, opera, composition, instrumental music, etc.)
Submit evidence of initial performance or publication. Submit a digital or hard copy of the score. Evidence of initial performance or publication may also be submitted in digital or hard copy format.

MUSIC COMPOSITION (CONTEMPORARY)

Submit the commercial recording. At least five original compositions must be presented.

PHOTOGRAPHY (film or digital; in color, black and white or both; a published book, a public exhibition, or other public presentation) Eligible are thematic bodies of work, or up to 15 individual images. Submit nomination with a PDF of nominated work or mailing a thumb drive containing images of the nomination. Printed photographs will also be accepted.

VISUAL ARTS (painting, sculpture, drawing, print, graphic arts, etc.) Eligible are thematic bodies of work, or up to 15 individual images. Submit nomination by with a PDF of images of nominated work or mailing a thumb drive containing images of the nomination.

Nominate through our website at ms-arts-letters.org, or by sending directly to Category Chairs, listed below:

FICTION

Laura Howell c/o Caroline Croom
501 Rayburn Ave
Ocean Springs, MS 39564
lvr.howell@gmail.com

LIFE WRITING

Talamieka Brice
214 Bridgeford Blvd
Ridgeland, MS 39157
talamieka@brice-media.com

NONFICTION

James G. Thomas
310 Dogwood Dr
Oxford, MS 38655
jgthomas@olemiss.edu

POETRY

Mary Thompson
221 Clark Street
Clarksdale, MS 38614
marymckthompson@gmail.com

YOUTH LITERATURE

Scott Naugle
554 East Second St
Pass Christian, MS 39571
naugle@live.com

MUSIC COMPOSITION (CLASS.)

Traci Stover
104 Mamie St
Hattiesburg, MS 39401
tracistover@gmail.com

MUSIC COMPOSITION (CONT.)

Sarah Newton
312 Third Ave
Hattiesburg, MS 39401
sarah.adm.newton@gmail.com

PHOTOGRAPHY

R. Kim Rushing
406 South 5th Ave
Cleveland, MS 38732
kimrushing@bellsouth.net

VISUAL ARTS

George Bassi, Lauren Rogers Museum of Art
P.O. Box 1108
Laurel, MS 39441
gbassi@LRMA.org

NOMINATION/MEMBER FORMS (or online at ms-arts-letters.org)

AWARD CATEGORY: _____
MEDIUM: _____
TITLE OF WORK: _____
FIRST SHOWN/PUBLISHED/PERFORMED: _____

NOMINEE DETAILS:

NAME OF NOMINEE: _____
NOMINEE’S ADDRESS: _____
NOMINEE PHONE: _____
NOMINEE E-MAIL: _____
NOMINEE EDUCATIONAL HISTORY: _____

Please explain the nominee’s Mississippi connection: _____

NOMINATOR/MEMBER DETAILS (must be MIAL member to nominate):

NAME OF MIAL MEMBER MAKING NOMINATION: _____
ADDRESS: _____
PHONE: _____
E-MAIL: _____



☐ I’d like to renew or begin my membership

2025–2026 MIAL Membership Dues

Name: _____ Telephone: _____
Mailing Address: _____
E-Mail Address: _____

Please make checks payable to MIAL and return to: Jan Taylor, Treasurer | P. O. Box 2346 | Jackson, MS 39225-2346

CIRCLE the appropriate membership category:

Student \$15 • Supporter \$35 • Contributing \$75 • Sustaining* \$150 • Institutional* \$150 • Patron* \$500 • Benefactor* \$1000+

*Levels recognized in newsletter, awards banquet program booklet, and website.
Contributions to MIAL are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.



Mississippi Institute of Arts & Letters
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Awarding Mississippi excellence since 1980.
Don't just sit there. Nominate.

Nominations due January 15, 2026
Awards Weekend June 12-13 in Jackson
ms-arts-letters.org

PHOTOGRAPH BY 2025 PHOTOGRAPHY WINNER ADAM SEMPUR