

MIAL

— 2026 —



The 47th Annual Awards Gala

June 13, 2026 • Jackson, Mississippi

This Forty-Seventh MIAL banquet is dedicated to

Earl Marcus Wiggs III

Mark joined the MIAL board in 2005 and has chaired nearly every Jackson banquet since then with a calm, cool demeanor.

During his tenure, he served as president, vice president, past president, and chair for several categories.

The Board of Governors depended on Mark to answer any questions that ever arose concerning our bylaws.

We will very much miss his leadership and guidance.



Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters

The 47th Annual Awards Gala

Saturday, June 13th, 2026

Mississippi Museum of Art

Jackson, Mississippi

Welcome and Introductions

Pete Halverson

2025-26 President, MIAL Board of Governors

Dinner

The 2026 MIAL Awards

Presented by Master of Ceremonies

Malcolm White

Author, Arts Leader, and Entrepreneur

Citation of Merit Awards

Attic Gallery

Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference

Special Achievement Awards

Ellen Ann Fentress

David Rae Morris

Noel Polk Lifetime Achievement Award

Richard Ford

Introduction of the 2026-27

Board of Governors and officers

Adjourn*

*Photos will be taken of all winners at the podium following the awards ceremony

2026 MIAL Award Recipients

FICTION: Addie Citchens

Dominion

Award Sponsor: *The Mississippi Quarterly*

NONFICTION: Anne E. Marshall

*Cassius Marcellus Clay: The Life of an Antislavery Slaveholder
and the Paradox of the American Reform*

Award Sponsor: George T. Shawhan, Margaret Anne and Jimmy Robbins

In memory of Dorothy Shawhan

LIFE WRITING: Lauren Rhoades

Split the Baby

Award Sponsor: Marion and Claiborne Barnwell

POETRY: Saddiq Dzukogi

Bakandamiya: An Elegy

Award Sponsor: Mary Thompson, Jenny Long, and Damian Augsberger

In honor of Samuel William Long

YOUTH LITERATURE: Derrick Barnes

I Got You: A Brother's Promise

Award Sponsor: Carol Tatum

MUSICAL COMPOSITION (CLASSICAL): Cecil Price Walden

Some Glad Morning

Award Sponsor: Family of Keith Dockery McLean

MUSICAL COMPOSITION (CONTEMPORARY): Molly Thomas

Tumble Home

Award Sponsor: Nan and Mike Sanders

PHOTOGRAPHY: Kat Fitzpatrick

Mockingbird Gallery Exhibit

Award Sponsor: Jean and Tim Medley

VISUAL ARTS: Jerrod Partridge

Call Home

Award Sponsor: Ouida and Wayne Drinkwater

CITATION OF MERIT: Attic Gallery

CITATION OF MERIT: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference

SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT: Ellen Ann Fentress

Film: *Eyes on Mississippi*

SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT: David Rae Morris

Film: *My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is*

NOEL POLK LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD: Richard Ford

Award Sponsor: Catalina and Scott Polk, Jennifer and Michael Heidelberg

Fiction: Addie Citchens

Dominion

Addie E. Citchens was born in the Mississippi Delta and lives in New Orleans. A graduate of Jackson State University, she also studied at the Callaloo Creative Writing Workshop. Her writing has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, the *Oxford American*, *Midnight & Indigo*, *Mississippi Folklife Magazine*, and other publications. She was the inaugural recipient of the Farrar, Straus and Giroux Writer's Fellowship, and her short story "That Girl" was an O. Henry Prize winner. Her debut novel, *Dominion*, was longlisted for the Center for Fiction First Novel Prize, the *LA Times* Book Prize for Fiction, The Women's Prize, and was a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award in Fiction.

Acceptance Remarks: Mississippi is the source of my ire, my joy, my disappointment, my love, my creativity, and myself; without it, my words would not carry the very distinctive, colorful, razored flavor they do. I am grateful to carry on this state's hallowed literary legacy and grateful for my work to have been seen and validated by the Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters. Thank you.

Judge's statement: Addie E. Citchens's *Dominion* is a nuanced and compelling novel about the subjugation and liberation of two women who love problematic men. Reflecting the cadence and language of the Baptist church and small-town Mississippi, *Dominion* follows Priscilla and Diamond as they free themselves from the religious, class, and cultural constraints of their world. Through bravery and compassion, Priscilla and Diamond learn to confront their own complicity in a patriarchal system that protects sexual abusers from consequences. While rooted in the specificity of time and place, Citchens's beautifully crafted language and collective storytelling belong to age-old stories of family, fear, and freedom. I fell in love with Priscilla and Diamond and their struggle to listen to their own voices in a society that doesn't value them. With this innovative debut, I believe Citchens joins a long tradition of Mississippi writers including William Faulkner, Kiese Laymon, and Jesmyn Ward whose stories resonate beyond the borders that contain them.

Judge's Bio: Sybil Baker is the author of five works of fiction, including *Apparitions*, and of the essay collection, *Immigration Essays*. Baker's work has appeared in *Panorama*, *The Critical Flame*, *Drunken Boat*, and *The Compressed Journal for the Arts*. She is a UC Foundation Professor at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, Director of the Meacham Writers' Workshop, and on faculty at the Yale Writer's Workshop.

Nonfiction: Anne E. Marshall

Cassius Marcellus Clay: The Life of an Antislavery Slaveholder and the Paradox of the American Reform

Anne E. Marshall is Professor of History at Mississippi State University, where she has taught since 2006. She has served as Executive Director of the U.S. Grant Association and Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library (located in Starkville, Mississippi). Marshall's latest book, *Cassius Marcellus Clay: The Life of an Antislavery Slaveholder and the Paradox of American Reform*, was published by University of North Carolina Press in September 2025. Her first book was *Creating a Confederate Kentucky: The Lost Cause and Civil War Memory in a Border State* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010). Her work has appeared in numerous journals, including the *Journal of the Civil War Era* and *Slavery & Abolition*. She received her BA in history at Centre College in Kentucky and her MA and PhD in history at the University of Georgia. A native of Lexington, Kentucky, Marshall lives in Starkville with her husband, two teenagers, and one spoiled dog.

Acceptance Remarks: I am incredibly humbled to be the recipient of the 2026 MIAL award for nonfiction. I am a native of Kentucky, and much of my scholarship has been rooted in the Bluegrass State. I have, however, called Mississippi my home for twenty years now, and it is both the Magnolia State's complicated past and often consternating present that have proven to be endless sources of curiosity and creativity for me. The mission of doing history in this state has fueled my work on Cassius Marcellus Clay and all of my scholarship. In this I am not alone. As all present know very well, Mississippi's alluvial soil is the fertile ground that has long nurtured some of the richest cultural expression in the world. For my work to be acknowledged by the MIAL, an organization that promotes and celebrates that heritage of literary and artistic expression, is a very special honor indeed.

Judge's statement: Cassius Clay was more than the nineteenth-century namesake of the boxer who changed his name to Muhammad Ali. The original Clay, a Kentucky planter and politician, was one of the great characters of his time: a seminal figure in the rise of the Republican Party, as well as a brawler, philanderer, and duelist. Once he was saved from a revolver's bullet by the scabbard of his Bowie knife. Another time he plunged that knife into the side of a political opponent. Most remarkably, Clay was an outspoken opponent of slavery—and a slaveowner himself.

Anne E. Marshall's *Cassius Marcellus Clay: The Life of an Antislavery Slaveholder and the Paradox of American Reform* narrates the subject's life with crisp prose, deft use of primary sources, and a wide scope of American

history. Most significantly, it demonstrates how Clay swam within one significant stream of antislavery politics. Unlike the radical abolitionists steeped in morality, he argued that slavery hampered the prosperity of southern whites. Marshall's beautiful biography sheds light on how the Civil War could destroy slavery yet leave white supremacy intact.

Judges Bio: Aram Goudsouzian is the Bizot Family Professor of History at the University of Memphis, where he serves as the director of the Marcus W. Orr Center for the Humanities. His books include *Down to the Crossroads: Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Meredith March Against Fear*; *King of the Court: Bill Russell and the Basketball Revolution*; and *The Men and the Moment: The Election of 1968 and the Rise of Partisan Politics in America*, among others.

Life Writing: Lauren Rhoades *Split the Baby*

Lauren Rhoades is a writer and editor living in Jackson, Mississippi. Originally from Denver, Colorado, Rhoades moved to Mississippi in 2013 to serve with AmeriCorps. She later started Mississippi's first fermentation company and served as director of the Eudora Welty House and Garden. She is currently deputy director at the Mississippi Arts Commission. In 2022, Rhoades founded *Rooted Magazine*, a bestselling Substack dedicated to telling unfiltered stories about what it means to call Mississippi home. Since then, she's published 150+ interviews with southern creatives and changemakers, hosted monthly book clubs with award-winning and debut authors, and platformed writing that speaks to the depth and complexity of Mississippi. Rhoades's essays have been published in *Literary Hub*, *Southwest Review*, *Salvation South*, and *Country Roads Magazine*, among many others. She holds a BA from the University of Colorado and an MFA in creative writing from the Mississippi University for Women. Rhoades's debut memoir, *Split the Baby: A Memoir in Pieces*, was published by Belle Point Press in June 2025.

Acceptance Remarks: As someone who is not from Mississippi but has chosen to make this state home, this award from the Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters means so much to me. Mississippi is where I found my creative voice. It's where I encountered countless writers and artists whose work inspired me to reckon with my own understanding of home. I'm humbled to be among fellow nominees whom I have long admired and whose writing wrestles with deep questions of identity, trauma, motherhood, and inheritance. I'd like to express my gratitude for the MFA program at the Mississippi University for Women, led by Kendall

Dunkelberg. Thank you, Ellen Ann Fentress, for your encouragement and wisdom. Thank you to David Lewis and the best team at the Mississippi Arts Commission. I'm always grateful for Mississippi's independent bookstores—including my hometown bookstore Lemuria—for lifting up our state's writers. Finally, thank you to my endlessly supportive husband, LaQuenza Morgan, our funny, beautiful, creative daughter, Ava, and my new, soon-to-be daughter who hopefully waits to arrive until after this award ceremony.

Judge's Statement: In its premise, *Split the Baby* is a simple story of a divorce and its toll on the children forced to navigate the often dueling relationships that ensue. But within that seemingly familiar frame, Lauren Rhoades blends hindsight, memory, and talent for detail and evocative but unpretentious metaphor to explore a unique, layered, and complicated universe, her childhood universe.

Her mother is Jewish and her father is Catholic. When they divorce and her father quickly marries a Catholic co-worker, Lauren and her brother find themselves growing up as “dual citizens of these two warring fiefdoms.” Searching for her identity, she compares herself to a double agent, and finds what she calls a, “shameful power, the power to shapeshift. To be Jewish and. Catholic. To move between my parents’ worlds, “a vessel of secrets.” At first, she aligns with her Barbie-like, anti-Semitic, Catholic stepmother, effectively rejecting her Jewish mother. But as 13, she goes through the training that leads to her bat mitzvah, the ceremony making her a Jewish woman, without sharing much about it with her father and stepmother. Later she converts to Catholicism, pleasing and placating her Catholic stepmother. She soon realizes that her “Christian indoctrination” made her feel like, “an interloper . . . pretending to belong.” No matter where she landed, she continually felt she was “doing religion wrong, rooting for two opposing teams.”

Throughout the book, Rhoades cleverly uses documents about her childhood and her mother's parenting diary to draw readers more deeply into her tangled universe. Eventually, her adult self begins to resolve the tensions and complete her quest to find a wholeness that had always eluded her.

Judge's Bio: Emily Yellin is a journalist, author, and producer. A longtime contributor to *The New York Times*, Yellin work has appeared in *Time*, *The Washington Post*, *The International Herald Tribune*, *Newsweek*, *Smithsonian* magazine, and other publications. She is the author of two previous books: *Your Call Is (Not That) Important to Us* and *Our Mothers' War*.

Poetry: Saddiq Dzukogi

Bakandamiya: An Elegy

Saddiq Dzukogi is a Nigerian poet and assistant professor of English at University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He is the author of *Your Crib, My Qibla* (Nebraska, 2021), winner of the Derek Walcott Prize for Poetry and the Julie Suk Award and shortlisted for the Nigeria Prize for Literature. His poems have appeared in *Poetry Magazine*, *Kenyon Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Narrative Magazine*, *Ploughshares*, *Guernica Magazine*, *Poetry London*, *Best American Experimental Writing Anthology*, and *Cincinnati Review*. He has received fellowships from the Nebraska Arts Council, Mississippi Arts Commission, and Cave Canem.

Acceptance Remarks: It is the honor of my life to return to a place that has called on me since I was a 7-year-old kid in Minna, Nigeria, learning the song about river Mississippi. I lived here and walked around shoeless on the earth of my favorite places, like Rose Garden in Starkville, North Farm, Noxubee Refuge—to establish connection with the voices of ancestors that called me, bearing stories in the hum of wind and the rustling of tree leaves. I am honored to be here again, in beloved, and difficult Mississippi. For the beautiful chaos it showed me. I am fond of it. And I will continue to celebrate it, because it is the place where I finally understood my blackness and my kin's who were ripped away from me hundreds of years ago. I have a daughter who is a Mississippian. Her umbilical cord was buried here as the love of this magnolia country is buried in my heart. Thank you to the judges, thank you to my nominators, thank you to Mississippi State University. Thank you all for honoring me. For seeing me. And most of all, thank you to Sa'adatu, the strength that keeps me standing, the flickering flame that lets me see the beauty of this world.

Judge's Statement: What if a poet's song is endless, synonymous with consciousness, and what if the poet's vision moves through time, spirit, and ancestral place without end? "I'm beyond the confines of time," writes Saddiq Dzukogi in this dazzling, ambitious, epic poem, "Bakandamiya: An Elegy," in the tradition of the Nigerian poetic form of the same name. This remarkable work spans centuries, moving with and through voice into an immemorial lyric present. But it's not in the service of synthesizing the past into one easily traceable arc or ready conclusion, even as "Bakandamiya," an elegy ultimately for the poet's own existence and a view to what could have been, in three long poems, is concerned with both history and mortality: "I provoke contradictions," Dzukogi's speaker claims, upending Walt Whitman's mere containment of multitudes. History's enmeshments with myth and detail of early Nigeria and Western Africa star and stud

Dzukogi's verse: for this poet, "[e]very object, every breathing thing, has a history." Prayer and meditation are portals to knowledge as history forms, reforms, and reincarnates again as Dzukogi's narratives lift and lilt between magnificent sweeps of anecdote and dream: "It is impossible to exist/outside of a story. Life is a loop." As historical figures are slain, legends dissolve, lands are lost, lifeways transmitted, spirits invoked, voices sing, and stories walk into bodies, so too does "Bakandamiya's" poetic reconstitution of these knowledges through elegy work against temporal destruction and churn. Saddiq Dzukogi, writing from both a deeply embodied and supernatural view all at once, connects us to both the past and ongoingness through this masterful work which expands the possibilities of what the lyric mode can, and henceforth will, become: "Call, O call them/to enter my mouth,/to enter my presence,/so my house can quake with the voice of the future."

Judge's Bio: Alicia Wright is the author of the poetry collection *You're Called by the Same Sound* and *A Coin, a Moth, a Literary Journal*. Wright serves as the editor of *Annulet* and *Annulet Editions*, and she works as managing editor of *The Iowa Review*.

Youth Literature: Derrick Barnes ***I Got You: A Brother's Promise***

Derrick Barnes is a three-time *New York Times* Bestselling children's book author of twenty-four titles. His work varies in multiple genres and ranges in age groups from pre-K to young adults. Such titles as *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut*, *I Am Every Good Thing*, *The King of Kindergarten*, *The Queen of Kindergarten*, *Victory. Stand!-Raising My Fist For Justice*, *Like Lava In My Veins*, and *The Incredibly Human Henson Blayze* have garnered almost every award and accolade in children's publishing: three time Coretta Scott King Author Honors, a Newbery Honor, a National Book Award Finalist, the Ezra Jack Keats Award, the Walter Dean Myers Award, the YALSA Excellence in Young Adult Nonfiction Award, *USA Today* Bestseller, an NAACP IMAGE Award Nominee, and he's the only author to win the Kirkus Prize twice.

He is a graduate of Jackson State University (BA in marketing 1999) and was the first African American male creative copywriter hired by Hallmark Cards. Derrick currently lives in Charlotte, North Carolina, with his enchanting wife, Dr. Tinka Barnes. They are the parents of four sons, the Mighty Barnes Brothers.

Acceptance Remarks:

My big brother Anthony and I would be strangers in another lifetime.

He is a regional manager for a wine company.

I just make up characters and stories for kids to read.

He is custom made suits, expensive steak dinners, Cuban cigars, and Kentucky Derbys.

I'm wide leg denim, work boots, shrimp po boys from a hole in the wall in New Orleans, and a corner table in the back of a small jazz club.

Polar opposites. But he will always be my hero.

On those long Greyhound rides during the summer to Lexington, Mississippi, to stay at our grandmother's shotgun house, he always made sure that I had my books and my writing materials. He has always protected his weird, creative, little brother, regardless of how different we are.

This book is a celebration of sibling love and appreciation. It is a tale on how we are lifted up by the people that we call family.

Thank you so very much for acknowledging my work. I will continue to write the kind of stories that resonate with all of us, regardless of ethnicity or race. I pray that our babies see each other at an early age, through literature and artwork created by people that care immensely about our future, and our collective humanity.

Thank you.

Judge's Statement: This beautifully illustrated, tenderly written picture book is a celebration not just of brotherhood, but of big brotherhood. The story gives flowers to the oft-overlooked older siblings who take seriously their role of shepherding their younger brothers (and, one could substitute, sisters) into the world, teaching them practical skills like how to put on cologne, and emotional skills, like how to stay calm during a storm. I also really appreciated that it explored the difficult emotions that younger siblings often experience when they feel their older sibling has "left them out." This story helps children to realize that their older sibling still loves them, even if they want to do things without them sometimes. The first time I read it, I only got a few pages in before the tears were falling as I thought of all the big brothers and sisters—and cousins—that I know who don't often hear how big of an impact they've had. I want to give this book to each of them.

Judge's Bio: Mary Annaise Heglar is the author of *Troubled Waters* and *The World Is Ours to Cherish*. Her work has appeared in *New York Magazine*, *The Nation*, *The Boston Globe*, *Vox*, *Rolling Stone*, and other outlets. Her work has also been featured in collections like *All We Can Save*, *The World As We Knew It*, *The Black Agenda*, *Letters to the Earth*, and *Not Too Late*.

Musical Composition (Classical): Cecil Price Walden **“some glad morning”**

Cecil Price Walden writes music “of powerful emotional intensity and passion . . . that is almost impossibly gorgeous.” (*Journal of Singing*)

A life-long Mississippian, Price draws on the rich musical, literary, and culinary legacies of the place to create work that is both familiar and new. Commissioned by the Southern Foodways Alliance in 2011, their cantata “Leaves of Greens” led *Southern Living Magazine* to name them a “Hero of the New South” (March 2012). “Sacred Spaces,” commissioned by Bruce Levingston for the Bicentennial of Mississippi, received premieres at the opening of the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum and Carnegie Hall. Their song cycle, “Abide with Me: 5 songs of love” has been heard around the country and was recorded by Jos Milton for Albany Records. Recent releases include Levingston’s recording of “songs without words” on Sono Luminus and “hours”, a major multimedia song cycle on Albany Records, written for and performed with Alice-Anne Light.

Price studied music, gender studies, and southern studies at the University of Mississippi and lives in Oxford, Mississippi, with their partner and their miniature schnauzer, Salome “Sally” von Bingen Walden.

Acceptance Remarks: I am tremendously grateful to be honored tonight as a Mississippi artist among other Mississippians, and am thankful to the MIAL for showcasing the bounty of our state. I would like to thank my chosen family, both here and beyond for their grace and love, and my collaborators, especially Tim Oliver and the University of Mississippi Wind Ensemble, for their musicianship and generosity.

My piece “some glad morning”, is about uncovering a kind of queer joy, ecstasy, and hope in the gospel hymns of my youth. Resilience in the face of prejudice is a survival tactic I learned from living here in Mississippi, a way that the crooked letters formed me. My work attempts to unearth the shine from the mud. May we continue to find the strength to shine brighter in the faces of those who would dim us.

I would like to dedicate this to the memory of Ann Abadie, who first nominated me for this award 14 years ago, and made me feel like a Mississippi artist before I knew I was one.

Judge’s Statement: Cecil Price Walden’s “some glad morning” is a triumph in wind ensemble composition. In particular, Cecil’s approach to color is sensitive and skillfully executed. They compose with a lush, pan-diatonic language that channels traditional Americana harmony into something unique and engaging.

Judge's Bio: JUNO-Nominated composer, Jared Miller's recent collaborators include the Chicago and Detroit Symphony Orchestras, the American Composers Orchestra, the Nashville Symphony, the symphony orchestras of Vancouver, Toronto, and Winnipeg, the Juilliard Orchestra, and the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra. Miller lives in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where he teaches at the UNC School of the Arts.

Musical Composition (Contemporary): Molly Thomas ***Tumble Home***

Singer-songwriter **Molly Thomas** crafts cinematic folk that merges Americana grit with symphonic scale, driven by her background as a classically trained violinist and arranger. Born and raised in Mississippi, now in Fairhope, Alabama, Thomas has built a reputation for richly layered compositions and emotionally resonant songwriting that bridges the worlds of roots music and orchestral texture.

Her fourth album, *Tumble Home*, marks a defining chapter in her career. Named after a nautical design that provides stability, the project took on deeper meaning after Thomas was sidelined by a serious car accident during recording. The album's themes of resilience, vulnerability, and renewal mirror her own recovery, lending a striking authenticity to the work.

Co-written and produced with Ken Rose (Marianne Faithfull, Kip Winger), *Tumble Home* features ten songs shaped by sweeping string arrangements and dynamic performances, including a guest appearance from Todd Snider.

A sought-after collaborator, Thomas has worked with Will Kimbrough, Guster, and The White Buffalo, and has appeared on *The Late Show with David Letterman* and *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, and stages including the Ryman Auditorium. Her work continues to bridge music and storytelling with striking emotional clarity.

Acceptance Remarks: Thank you so much for this honor. Receiving this award for *Tumble Home* means more to me than I can fully express.

This is my fourth album, along with an EP and several released singles. Each project has been part of a long and meaningful journey, and each have had a unique impact on my process and learning leading up to *Tumble Home* and where I am today as an artist. For many years, all I truly wanted was to be respected as a musician and songwriter, and tonight I feel the depth of that recognition in a very meaningful way.

I chose the path of music knowing it would require sacrifice, uncertainty, and risk. I did not build a conventional life because the calling to make music was simply too strong to ignore. Much of my path has also been spent helping lift up the music of others, and I am grateful that my own work is being recognized in this moment.

I want to thank Ken Rose (co-writer and co-producer on this record), my band, John Milham, John Keuler, and Rick Hirsch for fourteen years of making music together. Thank you to my friends and family for your support, and most of all, to my husband, Gary Brady, and my mother, Margaret Ewing Thomas.

Judge's Statement: Molly Thomas's latest album, *Tumble Home*, is a collection of expertly crafted sonic colors sprinkled with unconventional hooks and has a déjà vu inspiring quality that is somehow original and familiar at the same time. Beautifully recorded and well sequenced, *Tumble Home* is a cinematic journey through poignant memories that become those of the listener. The cloud like layers of soaring strings are lush and transformative, providing a perfect backdrop for her personal and relatable songwriting. Molly's vocal performance on her 2025 release *Tumble Home* is top notch and immediately engaging.

Judge's Bio: A drummer, percussionist and vocalist, Fields has been nominated for two Grammys, founded the Southwest Louisiana Blackpot Festival, and served as the executive director of Louisiana Folk Roots.

Photography: Kat Fitzpatrick ***Mockingbird Gallery Exhibit***

Artist/photographer **Kat Fitzpatrick's** day begins at 5:30 am. With strong morning coffee in hand she heads out into the darkness, open and willing. Like a fisherman returning to favorite spots again and again, her images record seasonal and environmental changes in light, atmosphere, wildlife, growth and decline. She calls this "checking the traps." These photographs are shared as a "catch of the day" online as well as a printed body of work. Fitzpatrick is also known for her colorful encaustic paintings (beeswax, pigment and damar crystals) on birch. Building on a technique dating back 1800 years, she incorporates modern methods of collage, carving, and image transfer to create contemporary yet timeless images.

Sometimes her photographs spark ideas for paintings. Sometimes the paintings use dreamlike or abstract imagery to celebrate her colorful world.

Fitzpatrick has traveled, taught workshops, and shown her work in galleries and museums for over 40 years. She holds a degree in Photography in Art from the University of Florida as well as a Masters of Teaching in Art from William Carey College.

Acceptance Remarks: I've called 233 Boardman home for 44 years. Babies raised, classes taught, paintings made.

A life.

Once there were sightings: fox-faced squirrels, the occasional black bear, and a cat-like creature nobody could agree on. Our house had stood proud since 1905. After it floated in Katrina on a 32-foot surge, another 1905 house took its place.

Today, I rise before 5:00 am in the still darkness, a thermos of strong coffee in hand. "Checking the traps" I follow the seawall glimpsing marsh and sandy shore. Large vacation homes and piers with sleek powerboats on electric winches hover over the unnaturally lit water. Security lights redefine darkness, confusing fish and migrating birds.

When I was a young photographer, I worshipped at the altar of great cameras and lenses. I was the proud owner of a second hand Nikon F. I felt its heaviness around my neck and believed it conferred a mantle of authenticity in a realm where I felt an impostor. I was a painter who fell in love with "the decisive moment."

Now, I rejoice in the simplicity (and lightness) of an iPhone 16 Pro Max. I studied with pioneering art photographers and ultimately earned a degree in creative photography from the University of Florida. I came to understand that magic is revealed through the "EYE of the beholder," no matter the medium. While "checking the traps," my brain is quiet and open to receiving. More, please.

Judge's Statement: My selection for the best photography goes to Kat Fitzpatrick. The consistency of style and technical prowess set the work apart. Photography, being mechanical, always has a technical aspect. So, the effective use of the tools of the trade is an essential aspect of the media. Fitzpatrick's choice to combine dramatic light sources and rich tones provides a consistent and alluring collection of imagery. The composition draws the viewer in to focus the attention, which is accented by the rich color tones and dynamic shadows.

There's a solid balance of quality and attention to detail in each image. This creates an effective series in which the individual images are inviting, and the series delivers a united theme. Fitzpatrick could expand these techniques beyond found subjects and add new elements to really give each scene a personal touch. The richness of color and contrasting lighting give the artist to continue to pull the viewer in and connect.

Judge's Bio: Paul Swen's work in photography, motion picture and marketing has garnered dozens of awards and has been featured in numerous exhibitions. In 2015, Swen launched a creative boutique, Wyde Fyre, that specializes in full-service communications. He continues to lead expeditions and promote conservation projects around the globe.

Visual Arts: Jerrod Partridge

Call Home

Jerrod Partridge is a full-time studio artist, educator, and curator on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. He and his wife own Palmette, a flower shop and art gallery in downtown Ocean Springs, Mississippi. Jerrod leads Visual Explorations trips to Europe each summer and also organizes Art Space 86 community art events. His work can be seen at Palmette; Fischer Galleries in Jackson, Mississippi; Southside Gallery in Oxford, Mississippi; and Claire Elizabeth Gallery in New Orleans, Louisiana. Jerrod earned a Master of Fine Arts degree from the New York Academy of Art in 2004. He studied graphic design at Mississippi College and spent a semester in London, England studying art history. Jerrod is a 2011 recipient of a Visual Arts Fellowship from the Mississippi Arts Commission, was named distinguished Alumnus of the Year for the MC Department of Art in 2017, and received the Jane Crater Hiatt Fellowship from the Mississippi Museum of Art in 2025. His website is www.jerrodpartridge.com and his Instagram page is @jerrodpartridge.

Acceptance Remarks: I have so much appreciation for TK Smith, the curator of the Mississippi Invitational last year for including my work in the exhibition and for his vision and support. Of course, my biggest supporter has always been my wife, Jessie. Though she hasn't always understood what I've chosen to paint, she has held my hand through everything I've done. And the list of friends, family, and collectors is too long to list, but your encouragement has kept me going. A career in the arts often feels like a daily mountain climb. Not an uphill climb but a sheer vertical ascent where every grip and toe hold becomes both thrilling and terrifying. Occasionally you reach a platform that allows you to stop, take a breath, and say "Damn, this is beautiful." So, thank you to the Board of Governors and members of the Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters for this view. It's beautiful.

Judge's Statement: Jerrod Partridge reimagines the tradition of still life. Using a painterly approach, loose brushstrokes, and a careful attention to light and form, he transforms ordinary objects of daily life into intimate meditations on contemporary experience. The tableaux are real and relatable: a sink of dishes, clothes waiting for a wash, an open refrigerator—commonplace scenes any viewer can relate to. The works challenge the classical notion of still life, grounding it firmly in the rhythms and material realities of modern life. The result is a thoughtful reinterpretation of the genre that bridges historical technique with a distinctly fresh perspective that reveals beauty in the mundane.

Judge's Bio: Michelle Schulte has an extensive background in museum and gallery management, art education, and southern art and history, currently serving as Senior Curator and Director of Programming at the LSU Museum of Art in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Schulte also currently serves as a volunteer leader for the Southeastern Museums Conference.

Citation of Merit: Attic Gallery

Opened in 1971, the **Attic Gallery** has become an art hunter's paradise in downtown Vicksburg. Lesley Silver is the driving force behind the gallery's fifty-four year existence. A talented artist herself, Lesley's keen eye for one-of-a-kind objects of art and jewelry has made the gallery a unique destination. Over the years, the gallery has cultivated the talents of Rick Anderson, Ron Lindsey, Kenneth Humphrey, Tony DiFatta, Ellen Langford, Wyatt Waters, Jean Blue, and Pat Odom, to name a few. The gallery is presented more like an artist's studio than a typical showcase. Rows of canvases and other objects line the walls. One can get lost within the colorful selection of artistic trinkets that cover every surface. You could spend hours browsing and not see the same thing twice. Every object a work of art. The Attic does not discriminate. Lesley has curated a unique collection of technically brilliant, trained creators and outsider artists. There is truly something for everyone.

Lesley Silver was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1942 and moved with her family to Birmingham, Alabama, in 1948. Her life has always revolved around art. Her mother, Klara Kooock, was a working artist who graduated from Pratt. Their home in Birmingham was filled with original art: on the walls and in progress, as well as books about art on the shelves and tables. Because of Klara's success, Lesley never planned to pursue a career as an artist. After attending the University of Alabama, she was married and raising a family when they took a trip out west in 1971. While visiting an art gallery in California, she entered a conversation with the gallery owner which led to her decision to open The Attic Gallery in downtown Vicksburg.

Operating a gallery put her in the ideal position of being surrounded by art and cultivating relationships with artists. For 55 years Lesley has been making connections between art, artists and visitors to the gallery. She has discovered and advised artists, and the Attic Gallery has been a place where generations have come to share, love, and acquire art.

Acceptance Remarks: I am deeply moved and thankful to the Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters for bringing such a body of special artists together. To be included in this group is beyond my dreams.

When I moved to Vicksburg in 1971, Mississippi seemed to me a place of bareness. When I looked for art, I could not find it. Now I see how rich our state is. I feel that Mississippi has risen to a place that has changed the perception of our state in the public eyes, and I am proud of who we have become.

Looking back, I have so many to thank: all the artists whose work has filled the walls with such quality; all my friends who have worked in the gallery; of course, my two daughters, Lisa and Kallyn; and my husband, Daniel Boone, who does so much to keep me and the gallery going.

Citation of Merit: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference

The Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference is the recipient of a Citation of Merit in recognition of its valuable contributions to Mississippi's rich literary and cultural heritage. Established in 1974 at the University of Mississippi, Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha is the longest-running conference dedicated to a single American author. It originated when Ann J. Abadie, who was working in continuing education, teamed with James Webb and Evans Harrington from the UM Department of English. The conference evolved from a correspondence course into an annual week-long program that draws Faulkner scholars and enthusiasts from across the nation and around the world.

Three directors have served with distinction since the conference's inception: Evans Harrington, Donald M. Kartiganer, and Jay Watson. Their visionary leadership has kept Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha at the cutting edge of Faulkner studies and enabled the conference to influence related fields of study. Since 1976, the conference has partnered with the University Press of Mississippi to publish the proceedings in the Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Series. As driving forces in Faulkner scholarship, these volumes have benefited from the editorial expertise of Abadie, the directors, and James G. Thomas, Jr. from the Center for the Study of Southern Culture. At the cusp of a new era, the Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference is positioned to continue serving as a vital gateway to Faulkner's "postage stamp of native soil," balancing rigorous scholarship with public enrichment.

Jay Watson is Distinguished Emeritus Professor of English and Howry Emeritus Professor of Faulkner Studies at the University of Mississippi, where he directed the annual Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference from 2011 to 2025. He is the author or editor of twenty-one published or forthcoming books, including *Fossil Fuel Faulkner: Energy, Modernity, and the US South* (2022) and *William Faulkner and the Faces of Modernity* (2019), both of which received the C. Hugh Holman Award from the Society for the Study of Southern Literature for the year's best book in

southern studies, and including fourteen volumes in the University Press of Mississippi's Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha series. From 2009 to 2012 he served as president of the William Faulkner Society, and for the 2002–03 academic year he was Visiting Fulbright Professor of American Studies at two universities in Finland, the University of Turku, and Åbo Akademi University. He lives in Oxford, Mississippi, and Asheville, North Carolina, with his wife, Susan.

Acceptance Remarks: It has been an honor, a privilege, and a great pleasure to steward, for fifteen years, the extraordinary and durable creation of James Webb, Evans Harrington, and Ann J. Abadie. The premise behind this event, which became a literary and cultural institution in our state, was simple: what might it mean for students of William Faulkner's work to share their ideas, year after year, in the specific environment in which he created that work, and which he took as an imaginative model for it? To explore Yoknapatawpha County from and on Yoknapatawpha ground, as it were? Great ideas are often simple, and over half a century this one has brought hundreds of writers and scholars to Faulkner's world, thousands of new readers to his work, and generations of visitors to our state, from all over the world. I'm at once proud and humbled to have been part of this work, to have traveled in such august footsteps, and to accept this citation on behalf of those who went before me.

Special Achievement: Ellen Ann Fentress
Film: *Eyes on Mississippi*

Ellen Ann Fentress is a writer, filmmaker, and teacher. Her memoir *The Steps We Take: A Memoir of Southern Reckoning* was the 2024 National Book Festival's Great Read from Mississippi. *Eyes on Mississippi*, her 57-minute documentary on journalist Bill Minor's civil rights reporting, streams via pbs.org: [www.pbs.org: www.pbs.org/video/eyes-on-mississippi-bmxwd3/](http://www.pbs.org/video/eyes-on-mississippi-bmxwd3/). Her first reporting job was with Minor's Jackson weekly, the *Capitol Reporter*. She later reported for the *Sun Herald* on the Gulf Coast and as state capitol bureau chief. Her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, the *Atlantic*, *Washington Post*, *Oxford American*, the *Baffler*, *Bitter Southerner*, and *Salvation South*. In 2019, she launched an online platform to publish first-person school stories from the post-integration South. The Admissions Project (admissionsprojects.com) captures alumni accounts from the region's legacy segregation academies and public schools. Site stories are quoted in six recent nonfiction books. She teaches in community workshops and the Mississippi University for Women's low-residency creative writing MFA program. A Greenwood native, she holds an MFA from Bennington College and is a graduate of Pillow Academy and Mississippi College.

Acceptance Remarks: When I first read Bill Minor's late, feisty *Capitol Reporter* weekly, he adjusted my own eyes on Mississippi. His journalism covered our state's underdogs, overlords, and the beauty and tragedy inside each one of us shaped by this place.

For Bill's memoir, the story he specifically wanted to tell was what he'd witnessed. Outwardly, *Eyes on Mississippi* was the name of his column, which ran, unbelievably, from 1947 until 2017. The term was a strategy too, though. In reporting civil rights-era events and injustice, he brought readers' eyes on Mississippi. Honest journalism is a counterforce. It can interrupt the status quo, no matter how ongoing, no matter how stacked the system. Bill's story remains relevant because forthright journalism always will be. Each of us needs to know history as well. We're wiser, fuller humans when we do, more helpless and gullible when we don't.

I'm grateful to co-writer and film editor Lida Gibson, the Minor family, and Mississippi Public Broadcasting, along with the eighty-nine donors who made capturing Bill Minor's story a reality.

Special Achievement: David Rae Morris
Film: *My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is*

David Rae Morris was born in Oxford, England, and grew up in New York City. He received a BA from Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts, in 1982, and an MA in journalism and mass communication from the University of Minnesota in 1991. His photographs and films have been published, exhibited, and shown widely. His latest book, *Love, Daddy: Letters from My Father*, was published by the University Press of Mississippi in April 2022. It won the 2023 Photography Award from the Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters. His film, *My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is: The Legacy of Dr. Jane Ellen McAllister*, which examines the life of the first Black woman to get a PhD in education from Columbia University's Teachers College in 1929 is currently making the rounds on the festival circuit. It won Best Feature Documentary at the Jackson Film Festival and Best Feature Documentary and the Mary E. Mills Social Justice Impact Award from the Tennessee International Independent Film Festival. He and his long time partner, Susanne Dietzel, live in New Orleans with two cats.

Acceptance Remarks: Thank you very much. This is a great honor to be up here (again). I won't lie, I lobbied for this award. But my motives were not entirely selfish. I thought it would be a good opportunity to suggest to the powers that be in the MIAL that they should add a category for film to the general awards. There are scores of amazing films being produced in Mississippi every year. That Thad Lee won the Special Achievement Award

last year and Ellen Ann and I share it this year would seem to bolster my case. I will even volunteer to help with the judging.

But the greatest satisfaction in winning is that I get to continue to help bring attention to the legacy of Dr. Jane Ellen McAllister. A native of Vicksburg, she graduated from Talladega College in 1919. She earned a MA from the University of Michigan in 1921 and was the first Black woman to receive a PhD from Columbia University's Teachers College in 1929. She taught for 50 years at HBCUs. She was a pioneer in education and a great Mississippian. I consider myself to be one of her last students. And I accept this award in her memory and on behalf of all of her former students. Thank you.

Noel Polk Lifetime Achievement Award: Richard Ford

Richard Ford was born in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1944, attended Murrah High School, and later Michigan State University and Washington University Law School. He is the author of thirteen books of fiction and a memoir, plus many essays and the screenplay for the film *Bright Angel*. His work has been recognized with the Pulitzer Prize, the Carnegie Medal for Fiction from the American Library Association, the Library of Congress Prize for Fiction, the PEN Faulkner Award, and many prizes abroad, including the Prix Femina in France, the Princess of Asturias Prize in Spain, the Gerhard Lenz Prize in Germany, the La Lectura Prize in Italy, and the Park Kyong-ni Prize in South Korea. His work has been translated into thirty-five languages. He was until recently the Mellon Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University, and Writer-in-Residence in Trinity College Dublin. He has lived in Maine for twenty-six years with his wife, Kristina Ford.

Other Nominees for Work Completed in 2025

Fiction, Category Chair: Laura Howell

- *Bodock: Stories*, Robert Busby
- *Saint of the Narrows Street*, William Boyle
- *Lay Your Armor Down*, Michael Farris Smith
- *Everybody Wants to Rule the World*, Ace Atkins
- *I Remember Everything: A Tale of Friendship*, Brooks Eason
- *Parable of the Talents*, John Jenkins
- *Indigene*, Sefi Atta

Nonfiction, Category Chair: James G. Thomas, Jr.

- *Between Grief and Nothing: The Passions, Addictions, and Tragic End of William Faulkner*, Lisa Hickman
- *Borrowed Land, Stolen Labor, and the Holy Spirit: The Struggle for Power and Equality in Holmes County, Mississippi*, Diane Feldman
- *Reconstruction in Mississippi, 1862-1877*, Jere Nash
- *Choctaw Tales: Stories from the Firekeepers*, Rae Nell Vaughn
- *Monumental Designs: Infrastructure and the Culture of the Tennessee Valley Authority*, Ted Atkinson
- *Choctaw Traditions: Stories of the Life and Customs of the Mississippi Choctaw*, Eddie Johnson and Jay Wesley
- *Afrofuturism and World Order*, Reynaldo Anderson
- *Get On the Job and Organize*, Jaz Brisack

Life Writing, Category Chair: Talamieka Brice

- *House of Smoke*, John T. Edge
- *Proud Flesh*, Catherine Simone Gray
- *The Dean: Memoirs & Missives*, Sparky Reardon
- *Beard: A Memoir of a Marriage*, Kelly Foster Lundquist
- *The Möbius Book*, Catherine Lacey

Poetry, Category Chair: Mary Thompson

- *Red Camaro*, Dwaine Rieves
- *Visual Chords*, Jianqing Zheng
- *Soulful Dancer*, Jianqing Zheng
- *Tree Fall with Birdsong*, Kendall Dunkelberg
- *Beyond the Watershed*, Nadia Alexis
- *No Rhododendron: Poems*, Samyak Shertok
- *There Are No Filipinos in Mississippi*, Noreen Ocampo
- *An Arm Fixed to a Wing*, Olivia Clare Friedman
- *Gadfly: A Lifetime of Writings*, Sherry Cothren
- *The Law of Truly Large Numbers*, James Kimbrell

Youth Literature, Category Chair: Scott Naugle

- *City Summer, Country Summer*, Kiese Laymon
- *The Incredibly Human Henson Blayze*, Derrick Barnes
- *Nic Blake and the Remarkables: The Book of Anansi: An Epic Adventure About a Young Hero and Legendary Secrets for Children*, Angie Thomas

Music Composition (Classical), Category Chair: Traci Stover

- *Grace*, Wes Cameron
- *First Snow*, Tae Young Hong
- *Echos of Christmas*, Valentin M. Bogden
- *Lament for the Red Mountain*, Valentin M. Bogden
- *Veriditas: Duet for Soprano & Cello*, Tim Coker and Scott Dickison
- *Light—An Advent Ghazal*, Tim Coker and Scott Dickison

Music Composition (Contemporary), Category Chair: Sarah Newton

- *Where I Lived*, Claire Holley
- *Can't Lose My Soul*, Annie and the Caldwells
- *Wilderness*, Alva Leigh
- *Six*, Bass Drum of Death
- *Live in Clarksdale*, Rashad the Blues Kid
- *It's My Time Now*, Garry Burnside
- *Film Score*, Fish Michie
- *No Separation*, MSPAINT

Photography, Category Chair: Kim Rushing

- *Hometown Mississippi*, Melody Golding
- *Grasslands*, Justin Sharp
- *The In-Between: Intimate and Candid Moments of Broadway Stars*, Jenny Anderson
- *Soulful Dancer*, William Ferris
- *Delta Landscapes*, Jianqing Zheng
- *Where Time Stands Still*, Christina McField

Visual Arts, Category Chair: George Bassi

- *For the Light Within*, Jenny Long
- *Birthday Cake for Flannery*, Blair Hobbs
- *Figuratively Thinking*, Earl Dismuke
- *Dream Lands*, Carl Blackledge
- *The Memory of Landscape*, Lucius Lamar
- *Paintings*, Gail Keenan Art Center, Kat Fitzpatrick
- *The Cotton Sack: Reimagined, Repurposed, Revolutionized*, J. Janice Coleman
- *Wonder*, Carlyle Wolfe Lee
- *Peculiar Landscapes*, Brooke Polly Alexander
- *Untitled (Various Works) - The Water Valley Main Street Association*, Kate Donovan
- *Sunset over Vicksburg*, Andrea Kostyal
- *Structures in Harmony*, Andrea Kostyal
- *MUW Gallery Exhibit*, Elaine Goodman

Previous Winners

1980

Literature - Ellen Douglas
Music - Luigi Zaninelli
Art - Ed McGowin

1981

Literature - Walker Percy
Music - James S. Sclater
Art - Ray Parrish

1982

Literature - Ellen Gilchrist
Music - William Grant Still (posthumously)
Art - Valerie Jaudon

1983

Literature - Ellen Douglas
Music - Patrick Houlihan
Art - George Wardlaw

1984

Literature - Rebecca Hill
Music - Patrick Houlihan
Art - James L. Seawright Jr.

1985

Literature - Ellen Gilchrist
Music - Luigi Zaninelli
Art - William Dunlap

1986

Literature - John Stone
Music - Samuel Jones
Art - Kenneth W. Marlow
Photography - Robert Townsend Jones Jr.
Special Writing Award - Dorothy Abbott

1987

Literature - Richard Ford
Music - David Caudill
Visual Art - Ke Francis
Photography - Birney Imes III

1988

Literature - Walker Percy
Music - Milton Babbitt
Visual Art - Zarah Maranian
Photography - Maude S. Clay
Lifetime Achievement - Eudora Welty

1989

Literature - Larry Brown

Music - Paul Overstreet
Visual Art - Mildred Nungester Wolfe
Photography - Rita Dewitt
Lifetime Achievement - Walter Anderson
(posthumously)

1990

Literature - Rick Bass
Music - James S. Sclater
Visual Art - Randy Hayes
Photography - William Eggleston
Special Achievement - William Ferris and
Charles Reagan Wilson

1991

Literature - Ellen Gilchrist
Music - Samuel Jones
Visual Art - Birney Imes III

1992

Fiction - Lewis Nordan
Nonfiction - Michael B. Ballard
Visual Art - Ron Dale
Photography - Maude S. Clay
Music - Luigi Zaninelli
Career Achievement in the
Performing Arts - Jane Reid Petty

1993

Fiction - Donna Tartt
Nonfiction - Chalmers Archer and
Clifton Taulbert
Visual Art - Jere H. Allen
Photography - Allen Frame

1994

Fiction - Barry Hannah
Nonfiction - Willie Morris
Visual Art - Greely Myatt
Photography - Tom Rankin
Music - Douglas McConnell

1995

Fiction - Beverly Lowry
Nonfiction - Mary Garrard
Visual Art - Sylvain Klaus
Photography - Birney Imes III
Music - James S. Sclater
Lifetime Achievement - Franke and
Bern Keating
Citation of Merit - ETV and Public Radio in
Mississippi

1996

Fiction – Lewis Nordan
Nonfiction – David Herbert Donald
Visual Art – Charles Carraway
Photography – Milly Moorhead
Music – Laurence M. Oden
Lifetime Achievement – Lee and Pup McCarty

1997

Fiction – Cynthia Shearer
Nonfiction – Stephen Ambrose
Visual Art – Valerie Jaudon
Photography – Marion Brown
Music – Mark Howell
Poetry – Paul Ruffin

1998

Fiction – Wylene Dunbar
Nonfiction – Will D. Campbell
Visual Art – William Dunlap
Photography – Hubert F. Worley Jr.
Music – Luigi Zaninelli
Poetry – Angela Ball
Special Achievement – Marion Barnwell

1999

Fiction – Ellen Douglas
Nonfiction – Patti Carr Black
Visual Art – Jean Cappadonna-Nichols
Photography – Lucinda Devlin
Music – James Sclater
Poetry – John Stone

2000

Fiction – Steve Yarbrough
Nonfiction – Edward Cohen
Visual Art – Paula Temple
Photography – Maude Schuyler Clay
Music – Luigi Zaninelli
Poetry – D. C. Berry
Lifetime Achievement – Leontyne Price
Citiation of Merit – University Press
of Mississippi

2001

Fiction – Howard Bahr
Nonfiction – Jeff Durstewitz and Ruth Williams
Visual Art – Collier B. Parker
Photography – Eudora Welty
Poetry – Natasha Trethewey

2002

Fiction – Barry Hannah
Nonfiction – Bobby DeLaughter
Visual Art – Sheila Stott Gourlay

Photography – John D. Lawrence
Music – Michael Kimber
Poetry – Brooks Haxton

2003

Fiction – Brad Watson
Nonfiction – Minor Ferris Buchanan
Visual Arts – Gwendolyn Magee
Photography – Jack Kotz
Music – Samuel Jones and James Sclater
Poetry – Natasha Trethewey
Lifetime Achievement – Mimi Garrard
and James Seawright

2004

Fiction – Tom Franklin
Nonfiction – Christopher Maurer
Visual Arts – Wyatt Waters
Music – Logan Skelton
Poetry – Ann Fisher-Wirth
Lifetime Achievement – Shelby Foote

2005

Fiction – Margaret McMullan
Nonfiction – Timothy B. Smith
Visual Arts – Sam Gilliam
Photography – Gretchen Haien
Music – Justin Sharp
Poetry – Brooks Haxton

2006

Fiction – Tom Bailey
Nonfiction – Suzanne Marrs
Visual Arts – Thomas Nawrocki
Photography – Robyn Moore
Music – Andrew Owen

2007

Fiction – Richard Ford
Nonfiction – Jere Nash and Andy Taggart
Music – Samuel Jones
Photography – Debra Ferguson
Poetry – Natasha Trethewey
Visual Arts – William Dunlap
Lifetime Achievement – Morgan Freeman and
Myrna Colley-Lee

2008

Fiction – Margaret McMullan
Music – Albert Oppenheimer
Nonfiction – Joseph Crespino
Photography – Talbot Easton Selby
Poetry – Angela Ball
Visual Arts – Carlyle Wolfe
Lifetime Achievement – Ellen Douglas

2009

Fiction – Howard Bahr
Music (Classical) – Steve Rouse
Music (Contemp.) – 3 Doors Down
Nonfiction – Douglas A. Blackmon
Photography – Jane Rule Burdine
Poetry – Brooks Haxton
Visual Arts – H. C. (Chris) Porter
Lifetime Achievement – Marshall Bouldin III and Elizabeth Spencer

2010

Fiction – Frederick Barthelme
Music (Classical) – Shandy Phillips
Music (Contemp.) – Caroline Herring
Nonfiction – Charles W. Eagles
Photography – Michael Loyd Young
Poetry – D. C. Berry
Visual Arts – Charles Crossley
Special Achievement – *The Passions of Walter Anderson*, a creative collaboration.
Lifetime Achievement – William Ferris

2011

Fiction – Brad Watson
Music (Classical) – Samuel Jones and James Sclater
Music (Contemp.) – Eden Brent
Nonfiction – Natasha Trethewey
Photography – Oraien Catledge
Poetry – Ava Leavell Haymon
Visual Arts – Rolland Golden
Lifetime Achievement – Mary D. Garrard

2012

Fiction – Michael Kardos
Music (Classical) – Shandy Phillips
Music (Contemp.) – Kate Campbell
Nonfiction – Susan Haltom
Photography – Betty Press
Poetry – T. R. Hummer
Visual Arts – Rod Moorhead
Lifetime Achievement – Andrew Bucci and Samuel Gore

2013

Fiction – Richard Ford
Music (Classical) – Steve Rouse
Music (Popular) – Caroline Herring
Nonfiction – Joseph Crespino
Photography – David Wharton
Poetry – Catherine Pierce
Visual Arts – Lee Renninger
Lifetime Achievement – Patti Carr Black

2014

Fiction – Steve Yarbrough
Music (Classical) – Quincy C. Hilliard
Music (Popular) – Claire Holley
Nonfiction – Jesmyn Ward
Photography – Milly West
Poetry – Derrick Harriell
Visual Arts – J J Foley
Lifetime Achievement – William Beckwith

2015

Fiction – Elizabeth Spencer
Music (Classical) – Crafton Beck
Music (Contemp.) – Water Liars
Nonfiction – Dennis J. Mitchell
Photography – Maude Schuyler Clay
Poetry – Timothy Earley
Visual Arts – Brandon Moon
Lifetime Achievement – Sammy Britt

2016

Fiction – Taylor Kitchings
Music (Classical) – Samuel Jones
Music (Contemp.) – Mac McAnally
Nonfiction – Joseph T. Reiff
Photography – Maude Schuyler Clay
Poetry – R. Flowers Rivera
Visual Arts – Martha Ferris
Lifetime Achievement – William Baggett and Ron Dale

2017

Fiction – Rick Bass
Music (Classical) – James S. Sclater
Music (Contemp.) – Fish Michie and Kristian Dambrino
Nonfiction – Jason Morgan Ward
Photography – David Wharton
Poetry – Catherine Pierce
Visual Arts – Carlyle Wolfe
Citiation of Merit – *Thacker Mountain Radio*
Special Achievement – Nan Sanders
Lifetime Achievement – Jere Allen and Samuel Jones

2018

Fiction – Michael Knight
Music (Classical) – James S. Sclater
Music (Contemp.) – Shannon McNally
Nonfiction – John T. Edge
Photography – Jack Spencer
Poetry – Molly McCully Brown
Visual Arts – Charlie Buckley
Special Achievement – *The Mississippi Encyclopedia*
Lifetime Achievement – Robert Ivy and Andrew Cary Young

2019

Fiction – Tiffany Quay Tyson
Music (Classical) – Steve Rouse
Music (Contemp.) – John Millham
Nonfiction – Julian Rankin
Photography – Rory Doyle
Poetry – Aimee Nezhukumatathil
Visual Arts – Coulter Fussell
Citation of Merit – Square Books
Lifetime Achievement – John Ruskey

2020

Fiction – Minrose Gwin
Nonfiction – Margaret McMullan
Music (Classical) – Steve Rouse
Music (Contemp.) – Bark (Susan and Tim Lee)
Photography – Will Jacks
Poetry – C. T. Salazar
Visual Arts – Stacey Johnson
Youth Literature – Angie Thomas
Citation of Merit – Lemuria Bookstore
Special Achievement – Mississippi Delta
Tennessee Williams Festival
Lifetime Achievement – Ann J. Abadie

2021

Fiction – Odie Lindsey
Nonfiction – Eddie S. Glaude Jr.
Music (Classical) – James Sclater
Music (Contemp.) – Steve Azar
Photography – Andrea Morales
Poetry – Catherine Pierce
Visual Arts – Cathy Hegman
Youth Literature – Deborah Wiles
Lifetime Achievement – Rea Hederman

2022

Fiction – Becky Hagenston
Nonfiction – W. Ralph Eubanks
Life Writing – Teresa Nicholas
Poetry – Joshua Nguyen
Youth Literature – Angie Thomas
Music (Classical) – Steve Rouse
Music (Contemp.) – Christone “Kingfish”
Ingram
Photography – Ashleigh Burke Coleman
Visual Arts – Jennifer Torres
Citation of Merit – MPB’s *Grassroots*, Bill
Ellison; MPB’s *Highway 61*, Scott Barretta
Special Achievement – *Look Away, Look Away*,
Patrick O’Connor
Lifetime Achievement – William R. Dunlap and
Kenneth Holditch

2023

Fiction – Sarah Adlakha
Nonfiction – Robert S. McElvaine
Life Writing – Berkley Hudson
Poetry – Melissa Ginsburg
Youth Literature – Linda Williams Jackson
Music (Classical) – Steve Rouse
Music (Contemp.) – Johnny Rawls
Photography – David Rae Morris
Visual Arts – Coulter Fussell
Special Achievement – Tupelo Reads
Lifetime Achievement – Panny Flautt Mayfield

2024

Fiction – Jesmyn Ward
Nonfiction – Charles Reagan Wilson
Life Writing – Lee Durkee
Poetry – A. H. Jerriod Avant
Youth Literature – Angie Thomas
Music (Classical) – Steve Rouse
Music (Contemp.) – Bark (Susan and Tim Lee)
Photography – Kate Medley
Visual Arts – Jennifer Drinkwater
Special Achievement – Stephen Coleman
Lifetime Achievement – Curtis Wilkie

2025

Fiction – Max Hipp
Nonfiction – Robert K. D. Colby
Life Writing – Julian Randall
Poetry – Jessica Fisher
Youth Literature – Allen R. Wells
Music (Classical) – John Wooton
Music (Contemporary) – Staples Jr. Singers
Photography – Adam Shemper
Visual Arts – Charlie Buckley
Special Achievement – Erin Austen Abbott
Citation of Merit – Thad Lee
Lifetime Achievement – John F. Marszalek

Note: Music Awards are for music composition.

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In Memoriam:

Mark Wiggs, Jackson

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1980	Noel Polk	2002	R. Kim Rushing
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1986	Estill Curtis Pennington	2008	Noel Polk
1987	Estill Curtis Pennington	2009	Ann Abadie
1988	Alexander Lee Nyerges	2010	Mark Wiggs
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- Carl Young Flowers, Jackson, for the floral designs and table decorations
- Ginger Williams Cook, Jackson, for her beautifully designed gifts for our honorees
- Jenny Woodruff, photographer for the evening
- Jeremiah Harris, arts weekend videographer
- To our award sponsors for their generous contributions
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Cover art by Jerrod Partridge

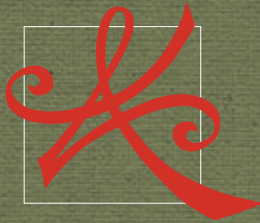
Artist Behind the 2026 Award Sculpture

In keeping with MIAL's commitment to supporting artists across Mississippi, the Board of Governors annually commissions a regional artist to create a sculpture for each year's honorees. This year's artist is Ginger Williams Cook of Jackson, Mississippi.

Artist Statement on the awards: I am honored to design a three-dimensional award to commemorate the outstanding achievements of the 2026 recipients and their recognition by the Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters. The wooden magnolia sculpture reimagines the magnolia flower's banality as an emblem in a fresh, vibrant way. Mississippi embodies many stereotypes that are rooted in a tumultuous past, often perpetuated by the myths of "moonlight and magnolias." It can be a state in which thriving in the arts is challenging. Still, those who observe and contextualize the mundane, criticize and challenge antiquated worldviews, and redefine ways to bloom where they are planted find themselves part of a legacy of excellence in the arts for which Mississippi is known.

Artist Bio: Ginger Williams Cook is a painter, published illustrator, and arts educator in Jackson, Mississippi. Her work has been featured internationally in exhibitions, film, and brand packaging. During Women's History Month, Ginger's illustration was selected for a limited run of Stacy's Pita Chips, benefitting Step Up Women's Network in 2017. The campaign led by Goodby Silverstein & Partners earned a Bronze Lion in Design at the prestigious Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity. In 2023, Ginger's paintings were exhibited at Ferrara Showman Gallery in New Orleans as a jury-selected finalist, and she was awarded the grand prize at the 27th Annual No Dead Artists International Juried Exhibition of Contemporary Art. Her solo exhibition and gallery premiere, *Abundance of Apollo: The Celestial Gods, Goddesses, and Heroes of Greek Mythology*, opened in January 2025. In January 2026, she exhibited a new series titled *The Curse* at Ferrara Showman Gallery. She is currently leading a community-centered art installation through the Jackson Friends of the Library at the Willie Morris Library in Jackson, Mississippi, featuring vibrant murals, children's artwork, and a visual timeline depicting the life and work of Willie Morris. The project is funded by a grant from the Mississippi Arts Commission.

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