I’d like to thank Richard for those more than generous remarks.

When I was working for a newspaper in Jackson some years ago, I became concerned that writing by our reporters was becoming too formulaic and less descriptive of actual events. I asked Richard if he could spend a week in the newsroom speaking to all reporters about writing and then hold small seminars for some of our most promising reporters. The result was better writing. In addition, several reporters moved on to larger newspapers. winning a number of major journalism awards, including Pulitzer Prizes.

When one thinks of the short history of the 21st century, one can only be dismayed. At the beginning of this century the attack on the World Trade Center was followed by a willful invasion of Iraq based on misinformation deliberately disseminated to the American public by its leaders. Now in the 21st year of the 21st century, we’ve endured a pandemic that has taken the lives of over three million persons worldwide – and again we’ve seen the results of the dissemination of misinformation by our leaders. And ominously in between, we’ve seen the return of totalitarian regimes that have stripped human rights from hundreds of millions of citizens.

But, during these two decades we’ve been guided and sustained by the humanizing power of art which, as it always has, shows us the best way forward. It reveals our humanity to others, even under the most trying of times. And one can only look at this evening’s award recipients to be reminded that Mississippi has contributed disproportionately to America’s art, music and literature. As one example among many, within a few moments’ drive from where we gather this evening, one can only be reminded of the novels of Jesmyn Ward, poems of Natasha Trethewey, the informative work of Eddie Glaude, the pottery of George Ohr and the illustrations of Walter Anderson.

The New York Review next year will move into a building that for over 50 years was the studio of the recently deceased graphic designer Milton Glaser. Milton was a founder of New York Magazine but he is probably best known for his logo: “I Heart NY”. On the glass transom above the front door to this building, he commissioned an etching of the words “Art is Work”. I think those are words with which most here this evening can agree.