



2025
Governor's **ARTS** AWARDS



THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2025
6:00 PM

FEBRUARY 6, 2025 at 6:00 PM at the TWO MISSISSIPPI MUSEUMS

CRAIG H. NEILSEN AUDITORIUM | 222 NORTH STREET | JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

Emcee **DANIELLA OROPEZA** | *Welcome* **DAVID LEWIS** Executive Director, Mississippi Arts Commission

Presentation of Awards
MISSISSIPPI'S GOVERNOR AND FIRST LADY
THE HONORABLE TATE REEVES and ELEE REEVES

ROBERT POORE

Excellence in Landscape
Architecture and Visual Arts

**RISING STARS FIVE
AND DRUM BAND**

Excellence in Traditional Arts

TATE TAYLOR

Excellence in Motion Picture

2025
Recipients

2025
Governor's
ARTS
AWARDS

JANE C. HIATT

Stephen C. Edds
Patron of the Arts Award

EDDIE COTTON JR

Excellence in Music

WALT GRAYSON

Lifetime Achievement

Video Tributes **MOSAIC MEDIA, INC.**

Music **THE ARTS AWARDS COMBO** led by **RAPHAEL SEMMES** (bass) with **BARRY LEACH** (guitar) and **BILL PERRY** (keyboard)

This program will be broadcast on the *Mississippi Arts Hour* on Mississippi Public Broadcasting Radio on Sunday, February 23, at 5:00 p.m.
Mississippi Public Broadcasting Television will broadcast the program on Friday, February 21, 7:30 p.m., and Sunday, February 23, 4:30 p.m.

2025 GOVERNOR'S ARTS AWARDS

DANIELLA OROPEZA *Emcee*



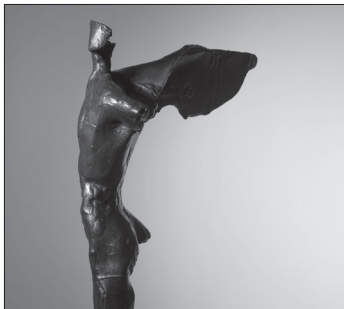
Daniella Oropeza is the Morning Anchor for WTVA 9 News TODAY. You can watch her every weekday morning. Previously, she worked as a reporter and evening anchor.

Daniella has shown versatility in her work and stories during her career at WTVA 9 News. From coverage throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic or learning first hand how residents in Jackson, Mississippi dealt without clean water for days, to reuniting a Mexican family with the firefighter that saved their baby by reporting in Spanish, she will do what it takes to give a voice to those who are voiceless. When she is not at work, she is serving her community as an advisory board member of the Salvation Army in Tupelo and helping promote El Pueblo and its services in Forest.

Daniella graduated from the University of Mississippi's School of Journalism and New Media. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Broadcast Journalism with a minor in Spanish and a specialization in Public Relations.

THE *Significance*

The Governor's Arts Awards program signifies the important relationship between government and the arts. The arts combine vision and creativity while enriching society's cultural horizons. Established in 1988, the Governor's Arts Awards recognize those who have made noteworthy contributions to, or achieved artistic excellence in, the state of Mississippi. The awards ceremony is presented each year by the Mississippi Arts Commission in partnership with the Governor's Office.



THE *Award*

Designed by William Dunlap, the awards, coined "The Mackie" by the Board of Commissioners, are winged figure sculptures cast in bronze entitled "Fragment." Dunlap calls his art "aesthetic archaeology," noting that the winged figure appeared in Western European mythology long before the Biblical representation of the angel. According to Dunlap, the image is as fresh as yesterday yet looks as though it could have been

made thousands of years ago. One of the most well-known winged figures in classical art is Nike, the Greek goddess of victory, certainly an appropriate symbol to recognize the deserving honorees of the Governor's Arts Awards.

A native of Webster County, Mississippi, Dunlap received a Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts in 1991 and served as Master of Ceremonies of the event for 18 years. During an illustrious career in the visual arts spanning more than three decades, he has become nationally known as a painter, printmaker, and sculptor.

THE STEPHEN C. EDDS PATRON OF THE ARTS *Award*

In concert with the office of Governor Tate Reeves, the Mississippi Arts Commission created the Stephen C. Edds Patron of the Arts Award in recognition of Steve's tireless efforts on behalf of the arts in Mississippi.

Motivated by an abiding love for the arts, Steve gave generously of his time, energy, and resources over the span of several decades. First appointed to the Mississippi Arts Commission by Governor William Winter in 1983, Steve served for several years before being reappointed by Governor Phil Bryant in 2014. At this time of his passing, in March 2022, Steve was serving—for the third time—as the Commission's Chair. In this role, Steve spent countless hours traveling across Mississippi to listen to and learn from local artists, community leaders, and cultural organizations. Through these and other personal connections he nourished, Steve was instrumental in effecting outcomes that continue to benefit the statewide arts community even day: a marked increase in funding for the Whole Schools Program and the restoration of funding for the Building Fund for the Arts, which (to date) has granted \$30.4 Million to 126 arts organizations in 52 counties across Mississippi.

An avid collector, Steve was a long-time supporter of the Mississippi Museum of Art, where, as a member of the Board of Trustees, he was instrumental in the Museum's capitol campaign to renovate its existing location. He gave his time to various other cultural organizations as well, having at one time served on the boards of the Southern Arts Federation, the Arts Alliance of Jackson and Hinds County, and the Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters.

As a true patron of the arts, Steve's legacy will live on through the artists he championed and the organizations he strengthened. In creating a Governor's Arts Award that bears Steve's name, the Mississippi Arts Commission pays tribute to a colleague and friend whose leadership, support, and generosity of spirit will continue to inspire us all.

2025 GOVERNOR'S ARTS AWARDS RECIPIENT



ROBERT POORE

EXCELLENCE IN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE AND VISUAL ARTS

Robert Poore has become Mississippi's premier landscape architect, and his excellence was recognized in 2023 by the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), with his inclusion in their Council of Fellows. He is one of two Mississippians to receive this honor in the category of works for his projects.

He is an artist with a 36-year career devoted to art and design through landscape architecture and creative collaborations with other artists and cultural institutions. Poore founded a landscape company called Native Habitats Landscape Architecture in Flora, Mississippi.

As a young man, Poore worked in landscaping. His father, Leon L. Poore, was a tree surgeon and landscape designer. Poore's father gave him his first books on landscape architecture when he was ten. However, Poore chose to study the architecture of buildings at Georgia Tech University. He realized this was not the right path, so he dropped out and worked in landscaping. In 1986, he returned to school at Mississippi State University to study landscape architecture.

Poore believes that nature is a process-generated art form. With an ecological focus, his designs work harmoniously with nature's processes and patterns, enhancing, promoting, and protecting unique places, plants, culture, and history across Mississippi and the South. His original landscape designs are on display across the state, including the Mississippi Art Garden, the gardens at the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science, the Mississippi Children's Museum Literacy Garden, and the Crosby Arboretum.

Poore collaborated with the late Ed Blake and Carol Franklin for the design of the nationally renowned Crosby Arboretum in Picayune, Mississippi, from 1986-1995. Crosby Arboretum is perhaps the most celebrated work of Mississippi landscape architecture and recipient of the 1991 National Honor Award from American Society of Landscape Architecture. As consulting landscape ecologist for the arboretum, he co-authored the Arboreport 3.3, a research study of representative natural sites that directly informed the arboretum design and won the 1992 President's Award of Excellence in Research from the Mississippi Chapter, and published *Enriching Urban Landscapes with Native Trees* which received the 1995 Merit Award from the Mississippi Chapter.

Since that time Poore has remained actively involved with the evolution of the arboretum, a unit of Mississippi State University. Working with landscape architecture students and professors, Poore helped design the gum pond wetland and bayhead stream forest exhibitions. From 2018-2020, Poore designed the Rosen Memorial Interpretive Pavilion. Over the years, Poore has received numerous recognitions for his work, including the 2013 ASLA MS Merit Award for The Art Garden, the 1991 ASLA National Honor Award for The Crosby Arboretum Master Plan, and the 1999 ASLA National Centennial Medallion Award for the Lake Terrace Convention Center.

Poore and his wife, Barbara Jean, have two children, Scott Poore and Kristy Hogan. Poore says that his children and four grandchildren are his greatest inspiration.

2025 GOVERNOR'S ARTS AWARDS RECIPIENT



THE RISING STARS FIFE AND DRUM BAND

EXCELLENCE IN TRADITIONAL ARTS

The Rising Stars Fife and Drum Band has kept the tradition of fife and drum musical expression alive and well for nearly 90 years. The art form has its roots in Mississippi, but has spread across the globe. Fife and drum music is mainly associated with Northern Mississippi and was popular during slavery and throughout the Civil War. Over one hundred years later, the father of fife and drum, Otha Turner, carried on the tradition during the 20th century. Today, his legacy lives on through the band led by his granddaughter, Shardé Thomas Mallory.

Mallory grew up hearing her grandfather play fife with her brother and cousins playing drums. Mallory wanted in on the fun, so Turner made her a fife of her own. Today, Mallory continues the family tradition by performing with the fife her grandfather made for her as well as the one he played when he was alive.

The band's origins date back to the 1970s, when Turner played with Jessie Mae Hemphill and Abe Young. At that time, they called themselves the "Mississippi Fife and Drum Corps." Later, Turner formed the current band with his grandchildren, naming the group "Rising Star."

After Turner's passing in 2003, Mallory decided to keep the band going in order to introduce fife and drum music to another generation. They changed the band's name to "Rising Stars" because each member shines in their own way. The band added more percussion incorporating corps-style drumming techniques, as well as faster tempos, and more pop music to their repertoire.

For over two decades, the Rising Stars Fife and Drum Band has been performing on the festival circuit and at significant venues, including the Cognac Passions Blues Festival, the National Museum of African American History and Culture's grand opening, and on university stages around the country. The band has traveled domestically and internationally, sharing this valuable art form in Europe and Africa.

Their work culminated with the 2023 release of the album *Evolution of Fife and Drum*, which features an eclectic mixture of traditional fife and drum music, gospel, pop, blues, and elements of West African culture. The album won the Memphis Blues Society's Best Self-Produced CD Competition in 2023.

The Rising Stars Fife and Drum Band has been a fixture in the long and strong legacy of Mississippi music and culture. The band has served Mississippi communities by educating young people on the fife and drum tradition and inspiring them to pursue their own artistic passions.

2025 GOVERNOR'S ARTS AWARDS RECIPIENT



TATE TAYLOR

EXCELLENCE IN MOTION PICTURE

Tate Taylor is a Mississippi-born and bred filmmaker whose work demonstrates his genuine ability to bring stories to life. Taylor has used his Southern upbringing to inspire art for the big screen. He has worked in front of and behind the camera. His rise to fame began with the feature film *The Help*, which gained four Academy Award nominations, including Best Motion Picture of the Year and an Oscar win by Octavia Spencer for Best Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role.

Taylor's impact is evident in his home state of Mississippi. By filming *The Help* in Greenwood and Jackson, Taylor brought significant attention and economic activity to the area. His commitment to filming in Mississippi has continued with other projects, fostering local talent and providing employment opportunities within the state. Taylor's work has

sparked conversations on social issues, particularly through *The Help*, which addressed race and civil rights themes, resonating deeply across the nation and contributing to a broader cultural discourse.

Taylor's adept storytelling, nuanced direction, and ability to elicit powerful performances from his actors are hallmarks of his films. His work, such as *Palm Royale* (2023), *Get On Up* (2014), and *The Girl on the Train* (2016), exhibit versatility and a deep understanding of character-driven narratives that resonate with a broad audience.

Taylor has played a pivotal role in enhancing Mississippi's image through his dedication to using the state as a backdrop for his films. His projects highlight Mississippi's natural beauty and historical significance, attracting national and international attention. By consistently choosing Mississippi for his productions, as seen in *Get on Up* and *Breaking News in Yuba County*, Taylor has helped establish the state as a viable and attractive location for the film industry.

Taylor's company, Crooked Letter Pictures, recently purchased over 100,000 square feet of empty warehouse space in Natchez, MS and founded Sandbox Stages and Production. This facility will allow movie producers to film an entire movie in one location and provide opportunities for the film industry in Mississippi.

In addition, Taylor is an entrepreneur who invests in businesses that provide opportunities for music and culinary arts, including Smoot's and The Little Easy in Natchez, as well as Church Hill Variety in Church Hill, Mississippi. He is a historic preservationist who understands the importance of preserving our rich Mississippi history and architecture. Taylor and his partner John Norris recently began the process to restore Mississippi's oldest Episcopal congregation—Christ Episcopal Church of Church Hill.

His work has boosted the local economy and promoted Mississippi as a place of artistic and cultural importance. He loves nowhere more than his home in Church Hill and has poured himself into economic development and the arts in nearby Natchez, where his film studio, Wyolah Entertainment, is based.

2025 GOVERNOR'S ARTS AWARDS RECIPIENT



JANE CRATER HIATT

STEPHEN C. EDDS PATRON OF THE ARTS AWARD

Jane Crater Hiatt is a retired arts administrator and ongoing arts patron who has left an indelible mark on the cultural landscape of Mississippi.

Jane received a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she was named a member of Phi Beta Kappa. She received her master's degree from Wake Forest University.

Hiatt began her Mississippi career at the Mississippi Humanities Council. She was quickly tapped to lead the ArtsAlliance of Jackson and Hinds County (now the Greater Jackson Arts Council), where she built a professional team of arts administrators and educators who embedded arts programs within the Hinds County and Jackson Public School systems and professionalized the grantmaking program. In 1987, she established the highly successful JubileeJAM! (Jackson Arts and Music Festival), which annually filled all downtown Jackson with up to 70,000 people, live music, and visual artist vendors for over twenty years.

During her time at the ArtsAlliance, Hiatt became actively involved in the civic life of Jackson. In 1988, she was a member of the first class of Leadership Jackson. Hiatt participated actively in its diversity and racial reconciliation programs, living up to her values of equity and inclusion throughout the rest of her professional and personal life. Far ahead of her time, Hiatt insisted that her boards and staff, wherever she worked, were representative of the constituencies they served, and thus, the public support of her work followed her wherever she landed.

After five years leading the state's largest local arts council, Hiatt was hired to lead the Mississippi Arts Commission, a position she held for six years. At MAC, Hiatt professionalized the grants program and created a Blue Ribbon Task Force to assess the state of arts education across MS and recommend strategies to fill the gaps. Thus began the Whole Schools Program which has continued to grow and impact students, teachers, and communities since its inauguration in one school in Tupelo during Hiatt's tenure. Again, instilling her values of inclusion into MAC's staff and programs, Hiatt insisted on racial, gender, and geographic diversity in grant panels, award recipients, and Commissioners. Hiatt reinvigorated and elevated the Governor's Arts Awards as an annual celebration of the highest caliber, garnering private and political support and attracting nationally acclaimed artists back to their home state.

During Hiatt's tenure at MAC, federal support for the arts through the NEA was threatened by the culture wars of the 1990s, instigated by federal grant awards to individual artists whose work some members of Congress found objectionable. Hiatt, highly respected in her field, was summoned to testify before Congress on the value of public arts funding. While the NEA survived, artist fellowships at the federal level did not. Hiatt, however, insisted that MAC would continue to fund artists directly because of her deep belief that artists are essential to the fabric of public life and her understanding of the impact unrestricted funding can have on an artistic career.

When Hiatt retired in 1995, she did not abandon her commitment to the arts and artists. She joined the board of the Mississippi Museum of Art (MMA) and served as its interim director in 2001. Having established one of the first donor-advised funds of the Community Foundation for Mississippi and the Mississippi Women's Foundation, she continued her grantmaking support as a private philanthropist.

Her chosen beneficiaries again included arts organizations throughout the state, such as the Mississippi Folk Arts Alliance and the Mississippi Book Festival. In 2003, she became the sole funder of the Mississippi Museum of Art's Mississippi Invitational, a biennial exhibition displaying the works of artists practicing in Mississippi. More than 220 Mississippi artists have exhibited works at the Invitational, and prestigious curators have visited these artists in their studios, offering constructive support and contacts to advance their careers. Not satisfied with funding the exhibition only, in 2005, Hiatt established the Jane Crater Hiatt Artist Fellowship, now funded at \$20,000, to one outstanding artist so that the artist can carve out time to travel and study and—in Hiatt's words—find the inspiration they need to advance to the next level of their careers. The impact of this support on the nine recipients thus far is incalculable. Artists have traveled from China to Florence, found new materials and new techniques, studied with their artistic idols, and continued to fill Mississippi communities with their studio practices that benefit students, collectors, and museum visitors alike.

Hiatt's deep generosity, her keen and strategic philanthropy, and her leadership and advocacy have continued to inform the cultural landscape of Mississippi through financial support, mentorships of a generation of arts leaders, and deep friendships with artists.

2025 GOVERNOR'S ARTS AWARDS RECIPIENT



EDDIE COTTON, JR.

EXCELLENCE IN MUSIC

Eddie Cotton, Jr. is a Gospel-infused, juke joint-style blues artist with a worldwide reach. He was born in Jackson, Mississippi, and moved to Clinton, Mississippi, when he was two years old. Cotton grew up singing and playing gospel music in his father's church. He started on the drums and then took piano lessons at home. As a youth, he began listening to the blues; it would not be long before that foot-stomping down-home music would stir in his soul, inspiring him to pick up the electric guitar and cleverly interpret the blues with an original modern flare.

When Cotton was six, his father took him to the YWCA on Farish St., where he took guitar lessons from Zac Harmon, who was 17 years old at the time. Cotton and his father often visited other churches, allowing Eddie to learn new chords and techniques and expand his

guitar skills. The gospel music he learned in the Church of God in Christ was a creative mix of funk, blues, and even a little jazz. Cotton was attracted to the blues while listening to it on the radio because it reminded him of church chords.

Cotton received a scholarship to Jackson State University (JSU), where he learned to play jazz and studied music theory. During his time at JSU, he began to get into the blues scene. Cotton frequented the legendary Subway Lounge, where he would watch King Edward Antoine play. Antoine soon learned that Cotton could play guitar and mentored him. Cotton joined King Edwards's band for almost two years until 1996 when he put together his own band, The Mississippi Cotton Club.

Cotton's music inspires his fans to get up, move, and dance. Cotton has shared line-ups with notables such as Hubert Sumlin, Honey Boy Edwards, Bobby Rush, B.B. King, Little Milton Campbell, Dorothy Moore, The Temptations, Cassandra Wilson, Smokey Wilson, Charlie Pride, Marty Stewart, Sonny Rhodes, The Williams Brothers, Mavis Staples, Gladys Knight, Chaka Khan, Patti LaBelle and many more.

His blues career has taken him all over the world, and he has played at prestigious festivals and events in Canada, Finland, Norway, France, Germany, and throughout the United States. Cotton has performed at four of the Mississippi GRAMMY Legacy shows cosponsored by the Recording Academy, Los Angeles, and the state of Mississippi. He has also been featured in numerous publications nationally and internationally and has appeared in several films about the blues.

Cotton's honors include The Peavey Award—2008, Winner of the Vicksburg Blues Society Blues Challenge -2014, Winner of the International Blues Challenge, Memphis—2015, Jackson Music Awards Entertainer of the Year – 2016, Jus Blues Awards Entertainer of the Year—2016, Central MS Blues Society Lifetime Achievement Award—2024. Among his awards and accolades, he has a Mississippi Blues Trail marker in his hometown of Clinton.

Cotton has recorded five albums, two of which were live recordings at the Alamo Theater in Jackson. His most recent release, *The Mirror* on the Malaco label, comprises all original songs. Cotton is continuing to perform at events nationally and internationally. He is working on a new album release for 2025 and is part of a book project about Jackson, Mississippi's music history, which will be unveiled in 2025.

2025 GOVERNOR'S ARTS AWARDS RECIPIENT



WALT GRAYSON

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

Walt Grayson, a revered figure in Mississippi, has spent over five decades narrating the stories of his beloved state.

Grayson grew up in Greenville, Mississippi, where he worked at WJPR radio station while in high school. Grayson never intended to pursue a career in broadcast. At Mississippi College, he chose a degree in Bible and a minor in history. Grayson aspired to become a preacher, but ultimately, his love of broadcast prevailed.

Grayson continued to work in radio for WRBC and several other Jackson radio stations until he transitioned to television in 1984 when he joined the WLBT team. Grayson wore many hats throughout his tenure there, including anchor, reporter, and weatherman.

With his deep connection to Mississippi's culture and his background in history, Grayson could tell Mississippi's story in a way that connected deeply with audiences. However, his impact goes beyond his professional achievements. Known for his warm demeanor and genuine connection with people, Grayson is often approached by fans who see him more as a cherished family member than a celebrity. His humility and accessibility have endeared him to many, making him a true icon of Mississippi culture.

It was a natural fit when Grayson was chosen to host *Mississippi Roads* on Mississippi Public Broadcasting (MPB), a program that explores Mississippi's history, culture, unique landmarks, people, and stories. During his time as host, Grayson told countless Mississippi stories. The program became so popular that it was picked up by the PBS Create Channel nationally.

His storytelling extends to print, Grayson has written four books about his travels around Mississippi and writes a monthly column for the Electric Cooperatives of Mississippi's newspaper, *Today in Mississippi*. His book *Looking Around Mississippi Some More* was selected as the 2008 non-fiction Book of the Year by the Mississippi Library Association.

Grayson continues to explore and share the stories of Mississippi, driven by an unwavering love for his home state and its people. He currently works as a news anchor and lifestyle/feature reporter for WJTV-12 in Jackson, Mississippi. His role at WJTV-12 allows him to continue his beloved storytelling tradition, capturing the essence of Mississippi for a new generation of viewers. Grayson won two Southeast Regional Emmy awards for his work on WJTV-12's *A Mississippi Carol* Christmas special.

Grayson has been honored numerous times for his outstanding work. He has multiple Emmy nominations and awards and is a member of the Mississippi Associated Press Broadcasters Hall of Fame and the Emmy Golden Circle. He also received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Mississippi Association of Broadcasters and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Greenville Arts Council.

As long as there are stories to tell and places to discover, Grayson remains dedicated to his craft, embodying the spirit of Mississippi through every tale he shares.

He is married to his junior high school sweetheart, Jo. Between them they have three children, four grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

2025 GOVERNOR'S ARTS AWARDS



**GEORGE
BASSI**

George Bassi is a native of Leland, MS, and received his undergraduate degree in Accounting and Computer Information Systems from Delta State University in 1987 and his Master of Arts degree in mass communications and public relations from The University of Southern Mississippi in 1993.

He has more than thirty years of non-profit management and arts administration experience working at the Delta State University Alumni & Foundation, the University of Southern Mississippi Foundation and the Lauren Rogers Museum of Art in Laurel, Mississippi where he currently serves as the Executive Director, a position he has held since 1994.

He is an accreditation reviewer for the American Alliance of Museums and is a Past President of the Board of the Southeastern Museums Conference. He has served as a faculty member for the Jekyll Island Management Institute since 2005 and is a Past Chair of the Council of Regions Association for the American Alliance of Museums. He serves on the Mississippi advisory committee for the National Museum of Women in the Arts, the Advisory Board for the Partners for the Arts at the University of Southern Mississippi, and the board of the Mississippi Institute of Arts & Letters, where he is a past president. He is on the board of the Economic Development Authority of Jones County, the Jones County Chamber of Commerce, and the United Way of the Pine Belt.

Selection Committee



**REBEKAH
PLEASANT**

Rebekah Pleasant serves as the Executive Director of Griot Arts Inc. in Clarksdale, MS, where she leads with a personal mission to create places into places where people can thrive. A wife, mother, movement artist, choreographer, and non-profit leader, Rebekah has built her career at the intersection of creativity and service.

Her dance career began at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts (UNCSA), where she performed with renowned companies such as Limon Dance Company and Lines Dance Company, as well as in works by Twyla Tharp and Lar Lubovitch. Rebekah's New York tenure included performances with The Metropolitan Opera, Helen Simoneau Danse, and Laurie Taylor's Soul Movement. She also toured internationally with G4 Galleries in China and the physically integrated dance company Full Radius Dance in South Korea and Spain. Her television appearances include roles in Netflix's *Raising Dion* and *Step Up Highwater*, along with choreographic credits for *Aloe Blacc's Super Bowl Pregame* show and contemporary/modern works performed by emerging professionals nationwide.

In her non-profit work, Rebekah has brought her passion for community engagement and social impact to several organizations including Refuge Coffee Co., Aspire Africa and Atlanta Guardian.

Rebekah's career embodies a seamless blend of artistry and advocacy, illustrating how her dedication to movement, storytelling, and service has inspired positive change and created enduring spaces where people flourish.

2025 GOVERNOR'S ARTS AWARDS



**FRANCINE
THOMAS
REYNOLDS**

Francine Thomas Reynolds has been the artistic director at New Stage Theatre, a professional theatre located in Jackson, since 2006 and has worked as a theatre artist for 37 years. She recently directed *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*, *Gaslight*, *Noises Off*, *Every Brilliant Thing*, *The Sound of Music*, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time*, *I Just Stopped By to See the Man*, *The Debate for Democracy*, *Pipeline*, *Bright Star*, *Hell in High Water*, *Sweat*, *Shakespeare in Love*, *Silent Sky*, and *Best of Enemies*.

Reynolds is a 2022 recipient of a Directing Fellowship from the Mississippi Arts Commission. She served three terms on the board of directors for the Theatre Communications Group (TCG) and several years on the Mississippi Theatre Association Board of Directors. Reynolds has served on grant panels for the National Endowment of the Arts and the Mississippi Arts Commission and has enjoyed adjudicating for Poetry Out Loud and the Southeastern Theatre Conference. She was a speaker for the 2021 Story State, produced by Mississippi State University. She worked several years as a locations casting director for film and television projects throughout the state. Originally, from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, Reynolds enjoys living in Jackson with her husband, Chuck.

Selection Committee



**ANTHONY
THAXTON**

Anthony Thaxton has won awards as a television director, painter, educator, photographer, writer, musician, and filmmaker (including the Southeast EMMY Award for Outstanding Documentary for *Walter Anderson: The Extraordinary Life and Art of The Islander*). He produced and directed the acclaimed film *Eudora* about Jackson's beloved writer, Eudora Welty, and co-wrote and designed the companion book. Anthony is a co-founding partner and ambassador of the Institute for Southern Storytelling at Mississippi College (where he was named 2019 Distinguished Art Alumnus of the Year). There, Anthony, his wife Amy, and long-time producing partner Robert St. John lovingly create films and programming about Mississippi and the south. Learn more or help support his work of mentoring young storytellers by visiting [Southernstorytelling.mc.edu](https://southernstorytelling.mc.edu).

2025 GOVERNOR'S ARTS AWARDS

STATE ELECTED OFFICIALS

THE HONORABLE TATE REEVES
Governor

**THE HONORABLE
DELBERT HOSEMANN**
Lieutenant Governor

THE HONORABLE MICHAEL WATSON
Secretary of State

THE HONORABLE LYNN FITCH
Attorney General

THE HONORABLE SHAD WHITE
State Auditor

THE HONORABLE DAVID MCRAE
State Treasurer

THE HONORABLE ANDY GIPSON
Commissioner of Agriculture
and Commerce

THE HONORABLE MIKE CHANEY
Commissioner of Insurance

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Thank
you!*

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2025 GOVERNOR'S ARTS AWARDS

2025

Eddie Cotton Jr.
Walt Grayson
Jane C. Hiatt
Robert Poore
Rising Stars Fife and Drum Band
Tate Taylor

2024

Peter Zapletal
100 Men Hall
Cedric Burnside
Brent Funderburk
Earl Poole Ball

2023

King Edward Antoine
Betsy Bradley
Ralph Eubanks
Dr. Ann Fisher-Wirth
Ke Francis
Ed McGowin
Robert M. Hearin Support Foundation

2022

Alcorn State University Jazz Festival
Myrna Colley-Lee
Larry Gordon
Holly Lange
Mary Lovelace O'Neal
The Williams Brothers

2021

Arthur Jafa
Nellie McInnis
Raphael Semmes
Tutwiler Quilters
Jesmyn Ward
Benjamin Wright

2020

Richard Kelso
Henry Danton
Tougaloo College Art Collection
Steve Forbert
Jackson Southernaires

2019

London Branch
The Canton Spirituals
Ruth Miller
New Stage Theatre
James Patterson
Hartley and Mary Peavey
Julia Reed

2018

Virginia Alice (V.A.) Bookhart Patterson
David Keary
Yoknapatawpha Arts Council
Steve Azar
Joseph Overstreet

2017

Sammy Britt
William R. Ferris

Vasti Jackson
Lucy Richardson Janoush
Jaimoe Johnie Johnson
Mississippi Opera

2016

Claudia Cartee
Scott Barretta
Dr. Tommie "Tonea" Stewart
Tig Notaro
Tom "Bones" Malone

2015

Lane Chapel Quintet
Maude Schuyler Clay
Chesney Blankenstein Doyle
MSU Riley Center for Education
and Performing Arts
Craig Wiseman

2014

Lesley Silver
John Maxwell
William Baggett
Jim Weatherly
James Cotton

2013

Kathryn Lewis
Bay St. Louis Little Theatre
Beth Henley
Eddie "Chank" Willis
Bobby Rush

2012

Althea Jerome
WellsFest
McCarty Pottery
Carl Jackson
Howard Bahr
Mose Allison

2011

Charles A. Rhoads
Natchez Literary & Cinema Celebration
Gwendolyn A. Magee
Mac McAnally
Joe Willie "Pinetop" Perkins

2010

Lenagene Waldrup
Bessie Johnson
Grassroots Radio Show
Wyatt Waters
David "Honeyboy" Edwards

2009

University of Southern
Mississippi Symphony Orchestra
WINGS Performing Arts Program, Lynn
Meadows Discovery Center
Wolfe Studio
Cassandra Wilson
John Grisham
Andrew Bucci

2025 GOVERNOR'S ARTS AWARDS

2008

Mississippi Museum of Art
Emma McCain
Lallah Miles Perry
Natasha Trethewey
Charley Pride

2007

Nora Davis Magnet School
Viking Range Corporation
Sam Gilliam
Sam Carr
Bo Diddley

2006

Casey Elementary School
The Craftsmen's Guild of Mississippi, Inc.
Bruce Levingston
Trustmark National Bank
Fletcher Cox
Sam Myers
Elizabeth Spencer

2005

Mississippi School for
Mathematics and Science
Pearl Public School District
Thacker Mountain Radio
Gladys Kemp Lisanby
Sela Ward
Will D. Campbell

2004

Greenville Arts Council
James "Super Chikan" Johnson

Rankin County Schools
Malcolm White
Mary Katharine Loyacono McCravey

2003

Dr. David Stuart Blackburn
Thallis Lewis
Charles Burnett
Mississippi Alliance for Arts Education
USA International Ballet Competition
William Eggleston
Rust College A'Cappella Choir
Little Milton (Campbell)

2002

B. B. King
John Paul
Bologna Performing Arts Center
Sally W. Carmichael
The Village of Taylor
Andrew Cary Young
William Carey College Theatre
Dr. Russell Thomas, Jr.
Stephen E. Ambrose

2001

Samuel Mockbee
Ronald Otto Schnell
Pierce Street Elementary School
Martha Layton
Richardson Tatum
Roger D. Malkin
Lester Senter
George Berry
Abie "Boogaloo" Ames

2000

Senator Thad Cochran
Andrew Lark, Jr.
Hattiesburg Arts Council
John Palmer
Sarah Gillespie
Crossroads Quilters
Stewart Family Pottery
Larry Brown
Charlie Musselwhite

1999

Johnnie Billington
Ellen Douglas (Josephine Haxton)
Mississippi State Hospital Community
Services Homeless Program
P. Sanders McNeal
Museum of the Southern
Jewish Experience
Colman Pearce
Kenneth Quinn
Roebuck "Pops" Staples
Marty Stuart

1998

Beechwood Elementary School in the
Vicksburg Warren School District for Arts
in Basic Curriculum
The Cotton Blossom Singers of
the Piney Woods School
Dr. David Daigneault
Eastman Memorial Foundation for
Support of the Lauren Rogers
Museum of Art

Milt Hinton
Natchez Opera Festival, Inc.

1997

Dr. Paul E. Ballard
Marshall Bouldin
Dr. Samuel Marshall Gore
International Paper
The Knight Foundation through The Sun
Herald, The City of Biloxi, The George E.
Ohr Arts and Cultural Center
The Library of Hattiesburg, Petal
and Forrest County
Malaco Records
Dr. Jean Simmons

1996

Entergy/MP&L Company
Morgan Freeman
Sid Graves
Lisa N. Howorth
Dorothy Moore
Dan Overly
University Press of Mississippi
Theo Inman Vaughney

1995

Thomas Jones Biggs
Shelby Foote
Gumtree Festival
Bill Mitchell
William D. Mounger
New Stage Theatre Education Program
Lida Rogers
Billie Jean Young

2025 GOVERNOR'S ARTS AWARDS

1994

Robert Parker Adams
B&P Interiors, Hinds County
Public Schools & Hinds County
Department of Human Services
Nelle DeLoach Elam
Keith Dockery McLean
Mississippi Action for Community
Education/Delta Arts Project
Willie Morris
Jim Timms

1993

Patti Carr Black
Vicki Bodenhamer
Eleanor Ferris
Richard Ford
Thomas Somerville Howorth
Mississippi Educational Television,
Mtel and USA International Ballet
Competition
Othar Turner

1992

Dr. Margaret Walker Alexander
Walter Anderson Museum of Art, City of
Ocean Springs & Jackson County
Board of Supervisors
Crosby Arboretum
Jane Reid-Petty
South Central Bell
West Tallahatchie High School
Mary Jane Whittington

1991

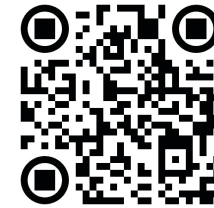
Center for the Study of Southern Culture
Chevron USA
Corinth Area Arts Council
William Dunlap
Jackson Public Schools and
Mississippi Symphony Orchestra
Ethel Wright Mohamed
Malcolm C. Norwood

1990

Eudora Welty
Starkville High School
Noxubee County Library
Mississippi Mass Choir
Mississippi Cultural Crossroads and
Claiborne County Board of Supervisors
Thalia Mara
Stuart C. Irby, Jr.

1988

Leontyne Price
Jean Chisholm Lindsey
Jackson Public Schools/Academic and
Performing Arts Complex Performing Arts
Division
City of Jackson
Barry Hannah
Deposit Guaranty National Bank
The Arts Alliance of Jackson & Hinds County



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Nominations for the 2026 Governor's Arts Awards
open on Tuesday, April 15, 2025.



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