

# UPSTATE DIARY

NOEL W ANDERSON: BLACK EXCELLENCE; JENNIE JIEUN LEE; CHENLU HOU and CHIARA NO; MARTHA FRIEDMAN, MIKA TAGA, and ALINA TENSER

March 3, 2026



Installation view, Mika Taga, September Gallery; Photo: Pierre Le Hors.

September Gallery presents three distinct solo shows, but the artists—Martha Friedman, Mika Taga and Alina Tenser—are united by an adventurous spirit of experimentation with materials and/or forms. Friedman uses rubber, glass, cement and steel in novel combinations that reference the body and bodily processes. Martha works with a former Merce Cunningham dancer as a model for her body casts. One of the most striking works here, *Finger Tip* (2025) features a large cement “finger” surmounted by a glass “cup” shape that is the inverse form of the concrete finger. The overall image might suggest Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling painting of Adam reaching out to God. It is the kind of tongue-in-cheek humor that permeates many of the Detroit-born artist’s works on view.

Mika Taga creates refined sculptures in wood, typically elegantly carved and sometimes burned into spare shapes that recall works of tribal art or early modernist sculptures by Arp, Brancusi or Barbara Hepworth. Often the works are made of two or more simple, but carefully carved and joined elements, as in *Walnut Embrace* (2024), with two interlocking curving wood elements. The most imposing work by the California-born artist, *Four Walls* (2026), made of salvaged hemlock barn beams, resembles an ancient tribal ritual object, with carved and burned passages of the four elements suggesting some esoteric, sacred purpose.

Works by Ukrainian-born artist Alina Tenser correspond to the esthetics of Minimalism, but with a decidedly feminist, post-modern twist. She presents two of her *Sleeved Meander* works in concrete and steel, with colorful, translucent, removable coverings, as well as a video, *Walk in Circles with Sharp Corners* (2023). These pieces correspond to a squat, quasi-kinetic floor-mounted circular sculpture *Circuit Meander* (2025) made with expanded metal and roller ball casters. All of Tenser's works relate in some way to her interests in performance and the viewer's interaction with the work. While the formal concerns and materials may vary, all three artists here allude to the human body and explore a highly personal, physical relationship to communal space. –**David Ebony**