

# Audrey Tulimiero Welch *Songlines*

Nancy Toomey Fine Art | 1275 Minnesota Street, San Francisco

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“Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains...  
On their backs were vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world  
in its becoming. Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put  
back. Not be made right again. In the deep glens where they lived all  
things were older than man and they hummed of mystery.”

-Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*







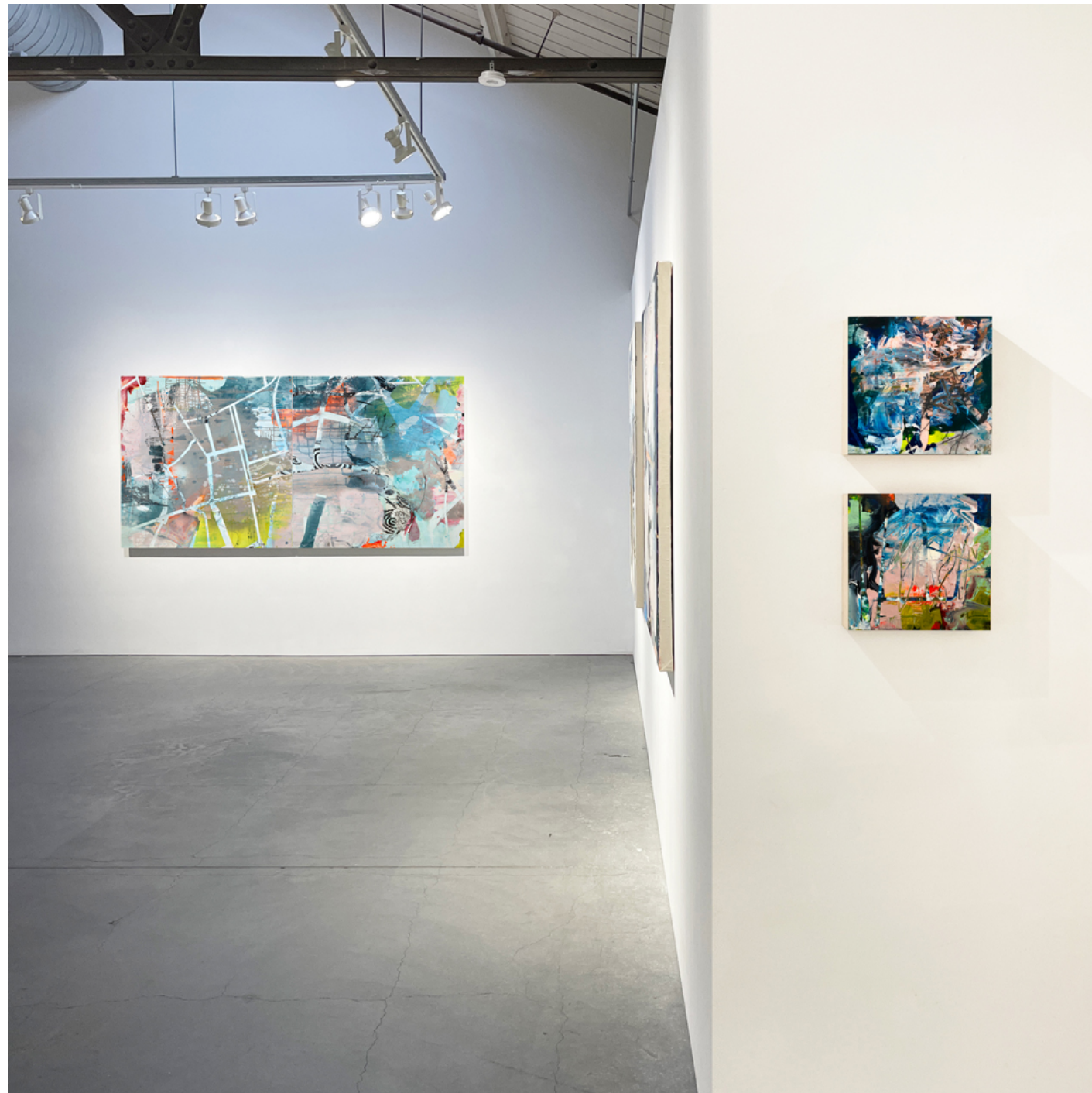
## Essay by Richard Speer

Wayfarer, way-finder, cartographer and alchemist, seeker and empath, the balmer and the balmed—artist Audrey Tulimiero Welch weaves disparate media and ideas together in complex and unexpected ways, diagramming our blessings and sorrows along the paths from valley to mountain to ocean and back again. Her mixed-media paintings remind us that mark-making and map-making are one; that rendered lines and human lives alike possess beginnings, endpoints, and rich middle grounds where tragedy, comedy, and catharsis intersect. They synthesize a cosmopolitan abstraction with one foot in the surging immediacy of neo-Expressionism, the other in postmodern pastiche. Deeply layered materially and thematically, they are the progeny of a lifetime of research, introspection, innovation, and a wanderlust that has carried Welch to the earth's four corners.



Given her peripatetic trajectory, her focus on abstracted allegorical maps would seem inevitable. She knows firsthand that all of us create maps with every step, plotting lines in space even if they leave no visible wakes. Once inscribed, lines can never be erased. Through her conjuring she transforms the particulars of place into achingly lyrical odes to that place's spirit, as Renaissance troubadours once trekked from town to town turning sentiment into song; and as Aboriginal Australians with their songlines have for millennia melded music, navigation, and cosmology, singing the very world into being. These maps are not literal but mnemonic; they share with the late Joan Mitchell's paintings a mission to reconstruct memories, places, people, experiences, and the intangibles that give them meaning.





As a thinker, Welch tends toward dialecticism, casting her aesthetic and philosophical concerns as “a constant wrestling” with polarities. Among these are the dualities between abstraction and representation (she studied with Russian portraitist Marck Kliensky and painted figuratively until 1988); duets between straight lines and gestures, structure and fluidity, opacity and translucence; the interior psychic world and the exterior world of society and politics; and the tension between the planned and “the improvisational, the unknown, chance, and the unexpected.” The finished pieces elegantly reconcile these opposing forces, transmuting dichotomy into integration.



Her paintings evince a strong corporeal presence. An avid walker, she is aware of her body and its relationship to her environs. She knows the rhythm of the stride and the brushstroke. In a 2017 statement for the exhibition *Tree, Map, Body* at Nancy Toomey Fine Art, she expressed an aim for “the viewer to be abducted into the visceral physicality of my paintings.” It is a genteel abduction. The austere interstitial lines crisscrossing her compositions function as structural bones, while the nuanced surfaces are like skin, translucent with vein-like pentimenti concealing and revealing, accreting and exfoliating. Typically, the epidermic outer layer is a thin application of plaster, lending sculptural and architectonic overtones. It’s notable that her Sicilian grandfather, Frank Messina, was a mason who used to cart her around in his truck, which was always redolent of plaster.





The material, she muses, is in her DNA, dually autobiographical and aesthetic. With a fresco's absorbancy, it soaks up and intensifies the impacts of ink washes and graphite. There are passages in her works that evoke two other painters who conflated paint with skin, Willem de Kooning and Lucien Freud—passages that turn a painted canvas into a mode of living, breathing being. It bears stating as well that when she tapes off lines, it's akin to putting a Bandaid on skin to help heal a cut. The paintings wear their wounds and wrinkles unapologetically, their topographies roadmaps of their evolving. This is a painter attuned to the universality not only of joy and hope, but also of suffering, worry, and grief, who through her artwork lays pathways toward healing. In earlier years she planned to become an art therapist, and in a certain sense, she did.



While her academic background includes a BFA from the University of Delaware, MFA from the Art Institute of Boston at Lesley University, and additional studies at Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and the Art Students League in New York City, her subsequent travels played an important auxiliary role in her stylistic and conceptual development. With her husband, geophysicist Chris Welch, she lived, worked, and raised a family in Sumatra, Indonesia (2002-2006), Nonthaburi, Thailand (2006-2011), and Perth, Australia (2011-2016). She drew inspiration from these distinctive ecospheres and cultures, incorporating rice paper, Bangkok city grids, monks' robes, and Aboriginal maps into a repository of images that already included the trees and vines of her native New Jersey and the landscapes of the Mid-Atlantic and New England. (She currently lives in the Pacific Northwest.) In this and many other ways, her migrations seeped into her paintings. Beholding them, we are reminded that all roads, no matter how far afield, have the capacity to lead ultimately back to ourselves; that venturing and homecoming are corollary impulses. What was Odysseus without the imperative of returning to Ithaca, or John F. Kennedy in 1961, setting forth his goal "before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon" without the crucial final phrase, "and returning him safely to the Earth"?





Having seen so much of the world has afforded Welch the opportunity to study the output of historic and contemporary artists who have influenced her—not only abstractionists whose syntaxes dovetail in certain fashions with her own, such as Cy Twombly, Helen Frankenthaler, early Philip Guston, and Julie Mehretu, but also exemplars of Renaissance and Baroque painting including Giotto, Titian, Caravaggio, and Tiepolo, who parlayed chiaroscuro and compositional drama into enduring masterpieces. Referring to her detailed notes and schemata, she sometimes builds visual quotations of paintings by these masters into the gestalt of her own. With this manner of close observation and deep scholarship, along with her eclectic interests, collegial spirit, and an undergirding of profound empathy, Audrey Tulimiero Welch embeds with her works a plenitude of art-historical, literary, and sociopolitical referents. The more one investigates a given piece, the more one uncovers; the more attentively one follows these extraordinary metaphoric maps, the more signposts one finds along the songlines.

-Richard Speer, 2022





Audrey Tulimiero Welch  
*Cosmic Dance*, 2021  
Acrylic, plaster, ink on canvas  
48 x 96 inches (diptych)





Audrey Tulimiero Welch

*Chickadee*, 2022

Acrylic and flashe on canvas

59 x 51 inches





Audrey Tulimiero Welch

*This morning she told him she still  
wanted to gaze into his green eyes, 2022*

Acrylic on canvas

48 x 48 inches





Audrey Tulimiero Welch

*Songlines 5, 2022*

Acrylic and flashe on panel

10 x 10 inches





Audrey Tulimiero Welch

*Songlines 6, 2022*

Acrylic and flashe on panel

10 x 10 inches





Audrey Tulimiero Welch

*Dervish 4*, 2021

Acrylic and flashe on paper

25 x 21 inches (framed)





Audrey Tulimiero Welch

*Dervish 7, 2021*

Acrylic and flashe on paper

25 x 21 inches (framed)





Audrey Tulimiero Welch

*Dervish 3*, 2021

Acrylic and flashe on paper

25 x 21 inches (framed)





Audrey Tulimiero Welch

*"How is it with this love, I see your world,  
but not you?" (after Rumi), 2022*

Acrylic on canvas

46 x 36 inches





Audrey Tulimiero Welch

*Songlines 2, 2022*

Acrylic, flashe, and plaster on canvas

24 x 24 inches





Audrey Tulimiero Welch

*Open the door and fly on your clay feet, 2021*

Acrylic on canvas

48 x 48 inches





Audrey Tulimiero Welch  
*Viriditas*, 2021  
Acrylic and plaster on canvas  
48 x 80 inches (diptych)





Audrey Tulimiero Welch

*Songlines 3, 2022*

Acrylic, flashe, and plaster on canvas

24 x 24 inches





Audrey Tulimiero Welch

*Songlines 1, 2022*

Acrylic, flashe, and plaster on canvas

24 x 24 inches



Audrey Tulimiero Welch, currently based in Tacoma, Washington, earned her BFA from the University of Delaware and MFA from the Art Institute of Boston at Lesley University. Welch's work has been exhibited throughout the United States, Bangkok, Indonesia, Germany, Singapore, and Australia. Her paintings are included in numerous prestigious public and private collections, including Google, Ronald Mc Donald House, Perth, Western Australia, Hyatt Regency, Oman, Four Seasons Hotel, MGM, Saks Fifth Avenue. She has had museum exhibitions at Tacoma Art Museum, Frauen Museum, Bonn, Germany, Bade Museum, Berkeley, California, Coos Bay Art Museum, Oregon, and the Museo Italo Americano in San Francisco. Her works has been published in *Fine Art Magazine*, *Architectural Digest*, *New American Paintings*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Fremantle Gazette*, and *SFMOMA Art News*. Welch is represented by Russo Lee Gallery in Portland, Robischon Gallery in Denver, and Nancy Toomey Fine Art in San Francisco.







Richard Speer is an American art critic, author, and curator whose reviews and essays have appeared in *ARTnews*, *Art Papers*, *Artpulse*, *Visual Art Source*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *Salon*, and *Newsweek*. Among his books are *Echoes Among The Tides* (Centre Picasso), *Halley/Mendini* (Mary Boone Gallery), *Eric Wert: Still Life* (Pomegranate), and *The Space of Effusion: Sam Francis in Japan* (Scheidegger & Spiess.) He has curated exhibitions for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, Verum Ultimum Gallery, and Pacific Northwest Sculptors and has received curatorial grants from the Ford Family Foundation and Sam Francis Foundation.



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