Shannon Castor ‘Tairseach/Threshold’ Review

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Shannon Castor’s series of three large scale oil paintings in the ‘Tairseach/Threshold’ exhibition at the Burren College of Art depict portraits of Castor, a runner immersed in her environment and fully attuned to her surroundings. Castor’s work alludes to the phenomenological aspects of her experience as a runner. The viewer senses an undeniable connection between Castor and the environment in which she moves. This connection is enhanced by the visceral quality of the oil paint and her use of vivid colours. Castor has thoughtfully executed a strong use of primary colours within this series of paintings. In *Run Psychology I, II, and III*, she highlights these primary colours in the sky; each individual painting utilizing a different primary as the predominant hue. Moreover, she carries these hues into the figure, further accentuating a deep connection between the runner and her environment. In all three paintings, but perhaps most notably in *Run Psychology III*, the figure’s face is flushed with shades of red, echoing the brilliant red in the sky and displaying the body’s physical response to the exertion from running outdoors.

From the presence of illusory and atmospheric space surrounding the figure, we become aware of the figure’s placement within an outdoor environment. However, the horizon line is completely pushed out of the frame in *Run Psychology I and II*, so that the viewer is confronted by larger than life portraits of the runner surrounded by the immersive atmosphere and sky. In *Run Psychology III* however, Castor provides us with a hint of the ground over which she runs with the subtle inclusion of a low horizon line. These unembellished and diffused backgrounds create a contemplative space for the viewer to consider the conversations existing between the mind of the runner and her environment.

While observing Castor’s three paintings hanging in the gallery space, we notice a mound of hazel bark shavings piled on the floor and crawling up the wall between two of her paintings. The hazel shavings, a work entitled *Epidermis* by artist Ellen Ferrier, cleverly create a conversation between Castor’s paintings and the work of the other artists within the show. We are reminded, through each of their works, the importance of a repeated engagement with their environment. Ferrier references her repetitive motion of shaving bark off hazel branches she collects locally, while Castor’s work references her recurrent act of running daily. Castor’s running practice, a repeated daily engagement with the same landscape, offers a unique perspective on a painter’s relationship with their subject matter.