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Melanie Friend

The Home Front

14.09.13 - 23.11.13

Impressions Gallery / Bradford / England

From the distant silhouette of a Lancaster bomber glimpsed over a British seaside resort, to the hidden world of global arms trade fairs, *The Home Front* explores links between militarism, marketing and entertainment. Made over four years, this is the international premiere of photographer Melanie Friend's major new exhibition.

Melanie Friend

'Hawk T1 military trainers (Red Arrows), Clacton Air Show, Essex, 26 August 2010' © Melanie Friend / courtesy Impressions Gallery.

The Home Front is a set of three related photographic series that together explore the civilian experience of war, with a particular focus on public air shows that take place at Royal Air Force bases, and in the skies above seaside resorts. The first series depicts expansive beachscapes that are temporarily militarised by the fleeting roar of fighter jets, whilst children and holidaymakers look up from below. Nostalgia for the Second World War is evoked by the display of 'warbirds' such as the Lancaster Bomber, whilst contemporary jets such as the Tornado, recently deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan, are also showcased.

The second series reveals the on-ground attractions of air shows. Frequently billed as a fun day out for the family, Friend captures the humour and unease in scenes of visitors taking tank rides, handling weapons, or trying on military uniforms. These air shows also offer opportunities for military recruitment and the commemoration of past conflicts.

In the third series, Friend offers a rare glimpse into the environments of international arms fairs and air show trade days, usually off-limits to the general public. Her photographs depict how military technology and services are marketed and sold, from the latest drone aircraft and gold-plated automatic weapons, through to special effects for simulated battle wounds.

Friend says 'there is a clear disconnect between the enjoyment of war technologies as leisure and entertainment, and the actual effect of weapons. I'm interested in examining our complicity as civilians with the wars our government undertakes, and uncovering how war is normalised'.

A touring exhibition commissioned by Impressions Gallery, curated by Pippa Oldfield.

All images © Melanie Friend / courtesy Impressions Gallery

Melanie Friend began her career as a photojournalist and radio reporter producing features for the anti-nuclear movement and for *The Guardian*, *Times Educational Supplement*, BBC Radio Four and BBC World Service. Much of her work has directly or indirectly engaged with conflict. From the mid 1990s she began working on long-term photographic projects, exhibiting at international museums and galleries including Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography, Toronto; Belfast Exposed Photography, Belfast; Hasselblad Centre, Sweden; and Houston Center for Photography, USA. Previous books and exhibitions include *Homes and Gardens: Documenting the Invisible* (1996), *No Place Like Home: Echoes from Kosovo* (2001), and *Border Country* (2007). Her work is held in the public collection of the National Portrait Gallery, London. She has lectured internationally including at the University of Harvard, USA; University of Oxford, UK; University of Paris, France; and University of Berne, Switzerland amongst others. Friend is currently Senior Lecturer (Photography) in the School of Media, Film and Music at the University of Sussex. www.melaniefriend.com

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