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Boys With Toys

The Home Front, Melanie Friend

It is to be hoped that the acrobatics of the Red Arrows are the closest most people in the UK will ever come to experiencing the sensory and emotional disturbance which accompanies the sight of military aircraft in action. Recently, of course, many in less fortunate parts of the world have been subject to the real thing, caught up in the fear and violence of explosions which follow the roar of a fighter jet passing overhead. When people look back with nostalgia to the time of the Second World War as one of 'proper values' and a 'sense of community', one wonders how keen they would also be to rediscover the arbitrariness of the falling bomb and collateral damage.

Melanie Friend spent a number of years on the UK's air show circuit, capturing crowds as they watch domesticated displays of militaristic aggression over beaches and other spaces of leisure. We see people of all ages – men and women, boys and girls – marvelling at the sight of contemporary and vintage aircraft circling overhead, including the terrifyingly thunderous Vulcan nuclear bomber, and getting their hands on various bits of military hardware on the ground. As Pippa Oldfield notes in the excellent essay accompanying Friend's equally stimulating images, perhaps the most disturbing aspect of *The Home Front* lies in how it suggests we seem happy to be co-opted

into 'cultures of militarisation', seduced by the glamour of technology, and encouraged to acknowledge a debt of gratitude to 'our boys'. Indeed, boys is often what they are; for as the head of the army's recruitment strategy observed in 2007, nurturing the next generation of soldiers 'starts with a seven-year old boy seeing a parachutist at an air show and thinking, "That looks great"'.

Edward Welch