



*Meditations* (2018), a high-octane dance music video, ups the ante further with its restless acid bassline. Here Bayliss couples found YouTube footage from working military airfields with sexualised pastiche dancing, all filtered through a lurid purple colour lens. Burly aircraft marshals ushering working planes in and out of airfields are pictured, incongruously, dressed in tiger onesies, unicorn masks and skimpy cut-off shorts. They strut, gyrate, cartwheel, moonwalk, mime the YMCA or the Macarena and blow kisses to the pilots they are seeing off, undermining the tone of seriousness that their jobs imply. These scenes are interspersed with shots of decommissioned fighter planes, in rosey soft focus, around which a figure – a stand-in of sorts for Bayliss himself – in skin-tight jumpsuit and unicorn mask awkwardly humps, grinds and dances provocatively. The silliness of all this larking about appears to us civilians, at least, as distinctly out of place.

But *Meditations* has other implications too, particularly for the way that it performs a destabilising of the codes of cultural and sexual signification. While inevitably cognisant of Freud's readings of airplanes as associated with the male upthrust, the real protagonists of the film are the marshals whose role, in Bayliss's handling, is more nuanced. Rooted to the ground – with its feminine connotations of 'Mother Earth' – they are dwarfed in size compared to the aircrafts and seemingly vulnerable, unprotected by the metal frame of the jets. But they are also empowered, pictured in roles of dominance, chaperoning the subservient aircrafts. Rather than emphasising this dominance though, Bayliss collates examples of the marshals themselves undermining the power dynamic, their coquettish performances queering the gender role, relations and assumptions that their line of work implies.

As our conversation comes to an end, before I catch my train home, it strikes me that there is something incongruent about the outgoing nature of Bayliss's work and the introverted nature of his demeanour. 'I feel like a lot of the time I'm trying to embarrass myself [in my work] and I don't really know why!', he tells me. He goes on to relay advice he was once given for writing poetry: 'bring out your extreme self' the poet Ella Frears counselled. This 'extreme' manifests in various ways: his characters and alter-egos are flamboyant; his use of colour gregarious (neon lights flash and day-glow painted words emanate an aura of acidity); and the punchy dance track plays on repeat, its energy and exuberance apparently limitless.

Bayliss's high-spirited antics are also however, inflected with melancholy. His undermining of the mores of sexuality in an irreverent pantomiming of otherness is partly because he himself feels like an outsider to these mores: 'I haven't felt the need to find belonging through familiar queer codes, etiquettes and aesthetics'. He puts this feeling down to his decision to live and work outside of urban centres in which these unspoken codes, he imagines, are written. In this sense *Meditations in an Emergency* feels like a personal exploration, through humour, respect, and mimicry, of what it means to perform sexuality on the social stage. Bayliss shoots through assumptions around what masculinity and queerness look and feel like, he dislocates hierarchies of the high and low-brow ensuring instead that paradoxes persist. In this his work unnerves at every turn, seeing to it that we never get too comfortable in its company.

### Lizzie Lloyd

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1. The title for the exhibition comes from Frank O'Hara's poem of the same name in O'Hara's collection, *Meditations in an Emergency* (1957).