

PENTONVILLE
GALLERY.

Waldemar Januszczak

George Blair

DEVOTED to agitprop art, the Pentonville Gallery has set out to needle an audience it will never get. Tucked away in a crumbling corner of Islington it can only shadow box with those traditional forces of repression, with police forces and politicians, with generals and businessmen. The actual passers-by must wonder why they are being told all this. What one wouldn't do for a gallery like this in Bond Street. . . .

With impeccable roots in pre-war Germany, descended from Dada and Grosz, the photomontage has long been the agitprop artist's chosen weapon. Easy and quick to produce, the only place it can attack is below the belt for it feeds on rosy visions of the same affluent society it so loves to savage. George Blair must eagerly await the arrival of his colour supplements, eagerly await the next instalment of life in the fitted kitchen.

But he's at his best when he too resists the temptation of all that juicy imagery on display. One unexpected juxtaposition, as the ad men will tell you, is more eloquent than a picture full of them.

A pair of New York cops in black leather bomber jackets are putting the boot in. Their victim is a butterfly. A gleaming white bride smiles innocently as a sweaty team of African labourers struggle to lower a giant gold ring over her head. This, says George Blair, is *Marriage a la Mode*.

With its in-built predictability — the artist is, after all, tapping a visual language we've all learnt; the collage will always come in magazine sizes — the photomontage must inevitably look familiar, old hat. But then the desperate search for separate identities which we expect our artists to undertake is in itself a suitable cause for concern. Just like the ad men with their endless bikinis, televisions and giant champagne bottles, George Blair spends much of this excellent exhibition repeating himself, making his point.

George Blair at the Pentonville Gallery, Amwell Street, London EC 1, until October 11.