

party games

by Max Henry

Connie Walsh, Oct. 14-Nov. 7, 1998, at Marianne Boesky Gallery, 51 Greene Street, New York, N.Y. 10013.



REC
1998

Party games are nothing if not fun, particularly for teens. At their core is a staged flirtation in which young adults can "accidentally" engage in some erotic play.

For her first solo show at Marianne Boesky, Connie Walsh presents three large video projections of people playing these kind of rec-room games. Walsh's videotapes alternate and repeat the various scenarios with different gender pairings -- two young women, two young men, or a heterosexual couple. Walsh pays particular attention to the sounds produced in the games, which fill the confines of the gallery.

On the far wall was a projection of two women bobbing for apples in an old tin washtub, the water noisily sloshing around. The two are laughing and attacking the floating red apples with a childlike enthusiasm.

On the left wall is a projection of two people, who each places one end of a string in his or her mouth. In the middle is a marshmallow, and the idea, of course, is to be first to the treat -- whether it's the sweet or something else. Each scene is a little drama, with the tension rising as the faces come closer and closer.

The third work shows the "orange pass," in which the players pass an orange to each other by the crooks of their necks, sometimes succeeding, sometimes failing and dropping the orange. Again, the physical proximity is charged with sexuality, as a stupid game miraculously puts its players in the posture of a kiss.

Walsh takes the role of a detached observer, though she is the one who stages these intimate and potentially awkward encounters. Some of her actors have established relationships with each other, while others are complete strangers. Walsh emphasizes the sexual subtext of these party games in her sound editing, which converts the heavy breathing and panting of play into a soundtrack more suggestive of love-making.

Walsh placed a grass-patterned hook rug on the floor in the center of the gallery as a kind of vantage point for the viewer, a bucolic allusion that is puzzling but may refer to Manet's famously controversial picnic painting, *Dejeuner sur l'herbe*. The argument is well taken, one supposes, that the avant-garde begins with something of a sexually charged party game.

MAX HENRY is a New York curator and critic.