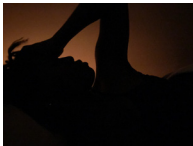
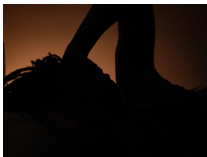


Autumn Knight

P I

N G



P I N G

Thea Spittle
Curator

Ping brings together four video works by the interdisciplinary artist Autumn Knight (b. 1980), and examines the visual and conceptual aspects of Knight's video practice since 2013. The works *Roach Dance* (2013-2019), *Trap and Transference* (2017-2019), and *Lincoln and Shoulder Pads* (2018-2019)— the latter made in collaboration with Chelsea Knight (b. 1976)— are projected on a single wall, in a loop. In an adjoining gallery, a newly-commissioned video installation *Pong!* occupies the space. When seen as a group, these four works reveal our concealed collective anxieties with recursive humor and meditation. *Ping* offers a moment to consider essential relational and linguistic aspects of our lives before they recede again into the background.

The word 'ping' means to send a message, and is also onomatopoeic, emulating the sound a message makes when it has been delivered. Further, 'ping' connotes a dialogue, the first move of a verbal, or physical, back and forth. Similarly, *Ping*, the exhibition, suggests one side of a resolved form, just as the video works each focus on one half of a pair: one half of a conversation, a friendship, a gaze, and an apprehension. Together, these works reshuffle social norms of communication by acknowledging both what is observable and what is implied.

This small publication is a companion to *Ping*, featuring newly-commissioned texts and images authored by Autumn Knight. Knight's contributions assume four distinct parts: an imagined conversation, a project proposal, a reflection on the politics of sartorial choice, and direct citations of therapeutic language. When read as a whole, these texts and images signal a parallel experience to their video counterparts. If the video works serve the ball, then Knight's written contributions return it.

Part 1

Roach Dance

[illegible]

The roach dance is a dance about those things that plague us. That are unrelenting. That are small enough to fit through the cracks of our minds. They are things that are swift. They can flatten their spines if they need to slip past you and in between two places. Maybe, perhaps those two places are fear and shame. Writing from the top of my head instead of inside my mind. The roach represents shame. The Roach Dance is performed in the style of a dance as most dances are performed. To ward off evil. To celebrate defeat. Roaches at once felt like an insurmountable obstacle. As I mentioned before, unrelentless. We took baths every day. I used to believe that if you had roaches in your house, it meant that you were filthy. The roach is an innocent creature.

2 Roaches Sittin' Around Talkin'

Roach 1:

I am a cabinet roach. Where do you live?

Roach 2:

I am a bathroom roach.

Roach 1:

Oh?

Roach 2:

Oh?! What does that mean.

Roach 1:

I mean I've never been there. What goes on there? What do you do there?

Roach 3:

Hi! Sorry I'm late. Smooches!!!

Tentacles rub together slightly

I'm coming from the garage.

Roach 1:

I was just asking Justine about her area.

Roach 2:

Well, we aren't very different except that in my area we spend much time in the ceilings. Right above the shower. It's nice up there and surviving isn't that hard.

Roach 1:

Surviving's hard for everyone!

Roach 3:

Not really in the garage.

Nibbles on something tucked behind wings

Roach 2:

That's because it's totally dark in there, low interaction. What do you even eat there? What are you eating now?

Roach 3:

There's plenty to eat. We can't all be kitchen roaches! What do you eat in the bathroom?

Roach 2:

Human skin flakes and soap bubble milk. It's delicious.

Roach 3:

Sounds good.

Roach 1:

I resent your comment about kitchen roaches. Yes, there is a bountiful selection of natural foods, but we still work hard for it. I am happy to meet you Justine. I wanted us to get together not to talk about diets or where we live. I mean we're all a part of this ecosystem. I want to talk about our conference and get some ideas about what the best location might be.

Roach 3:

Still eating

Sorry, I'm famished. We do have a long and beautiful, yet troubled history. We have to make sure the location is in a place we can travel to safely. Obviously at night. If it's in the garage, we can have it any time of the day. There's a lot to get into!

Roach 2:

I agree, but we are bound to get trampled and attacked traveling there. We can both travel at night and be there at night. What if we get stuck there?

Roach 1:

That's a great point. You obviously can't live there for very long. It's already overcrowded. And any overflow to the kitchen will be clearly visible, inviting attacks – almost certainly.

Roach 3:

Ok, look let's put a pin in it for now. I feel like we're working on some military strategy.

Roach 2:

But half of our life is about strategy, protection, survival, procreation.

Roach 3:

Yes, but our lives are short. Any one of us can get squashed, blasted, or drowned out at any moment. Let's talk about something else.

Roach 1:

I agree. How are your children?

Roach 2:

Mine are great. Learning to climb walls. They're so fast! They can dart in and out of cracks faster than I ever could at their age.

Roach 3:

Actually ladies, I'm looking for somewhere to get an antennae refresher? Any ideas?

Roach 1:

When are we going to talk about the Albino family???

Part 2

PONG!




A PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A project description (no more than 300 words, include why this should screen at)

MY PROPOSED PROJECT FOR

Project Space is *Ping Pong* (working title), a new work featuring a woman playing ping pong with various opponents inside a restrictive space.

The content consists of a staged event wherein participants, inches away from the ping pong table, watch her compete allowing themselves to get caught in the violent path of the ball flying back and forth. This project began at an artist residency I attended. During breaks from the studio, artists played ping pong— possibly to beat the artistic mental block? One woman artist, a painter, emerged as the best player out of nearly 70 artists. Her demeanor as she effortlessly defeated all other competitors captivated my attention. I relocated the entire table into my studio to study her subtle power and engage others as witnesses.

A hand holding a tennis racket against a green background. The racket is positioned diagonally, with the head of the racket pointing towards the bottom right. The background is a solid green color.

I gathered the footage to consider later in a different context. At this moment, as the American public revisits Billie Jean King's famous tennis match, "The Battle of the Sexes" against Bobby Riggs, I place my video in conversation with that event. This famous 1973 tennis match between a male and female player, was at the time considered a publicity stunt, much in the same way that my staged match event appears to be a performative gesture.

In reality, both events illuminate the multiple spaces that women can demonstrate their intellectual and physical dexterity.

While the video is lyrical and aesthetically vivid, this project should screen at because it uniquely demonstrates a hybridized video art practice. It is a mixture of intervention, performance, installation, and documentary work. The staged ping pong game and its onlookers are a stand-in for the emergent competitive space opening wider for women, its witnesses, and the back and forth battle to sustain equality.

[ADDRESS]

Re: PONG!

Dear Serena,

I propose a thing to you: allow us to behold your greatness for as long as you wish. I am considering the way you, in this our 20th and 21st centuries, made competition sexy, long-lasting, and fierce—as the kids say. You are the nemesis, the unintentional shamer of our collective bodily slack, our laziness. I hope you will forgive us in our worship and imitation of you. You fill stadiums. You fill our hearts. When you stop playing, we will return our tennis rackets to their respective thrift stores. We are not you, nor could we ever hope to be. But that's what you gave us—hope. Your frame is what we can hang our fantasies of a goddess warrior on—we dress you in it, you drip with it. Thank you, Althea. Thank you, Venus. Elegant and sturdy. We do not take you for granted.



Did you wink at me? Oh, that's just sweat in your eye.

I should cut this letter short. You have records to shatter. They had their battle of the sexes. You, my dear, are winning a war against the world. Unfortunately, we are so bound to the idea of the sexes, yet somehow, do not have access to it. Luckily you can opt into and out of this mortal form as you wish. At the end of the day, my love, I jest. I know you are human. So we will soak your real human bones and muscles when you are tired. We will allow you to retire when you must tend to the other reasons you are here on this earth. Thank you for allowing us to bear witness.

Love,

.....



video stills are courtesy of
Autumn Knight and Chelsea Knight



Lincoln and Shoulder Pads

a video by Autumn Knight and Chelsea Knight



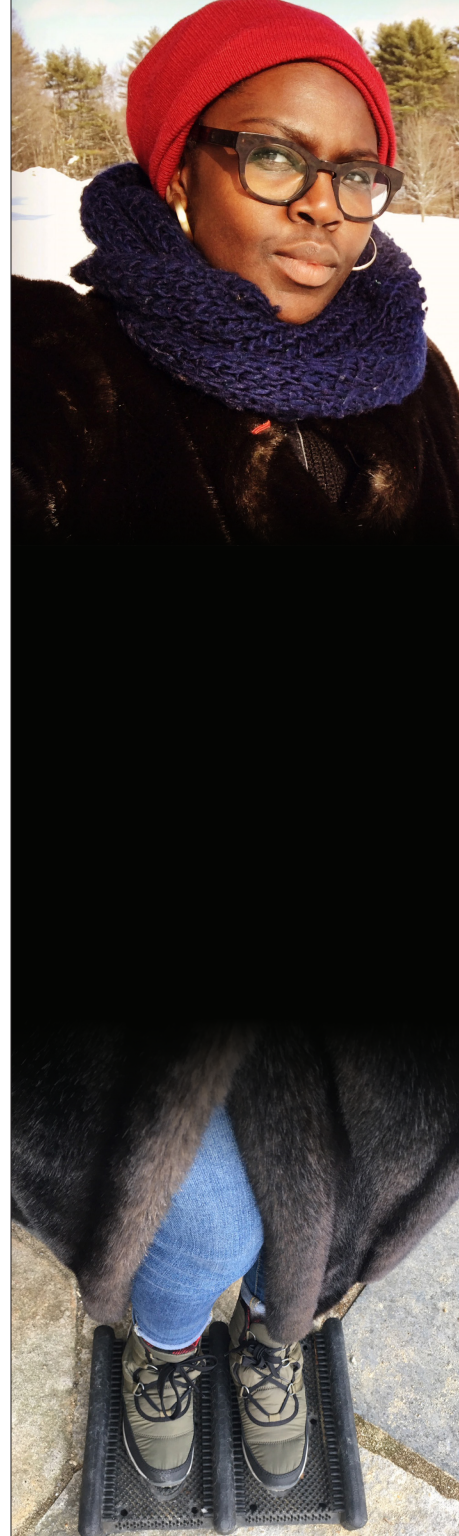
An individual text by Autumn Knight

Fur coat.

“But there is a sense among many black women that this broader, cultural disavowal of fur has coincided with our increased ability to purchase it. (Or as Paula Marie Seniors, a historian and professor of Africana studies at Virginia Tech, reported her mother saying: “As soon as black women could afford to buy mink coats, white society and white women said fur was all wrong, verboten, passé.”) For women like my mother and grandmother, my aunts and my sisters, a fur coat is more than a personal luxury item. It is an important investment.”

“In 2008, the organization took it a step further, and antagonized Aretha Franklin with a cruel open letter. “Music lovers may think of you as a ‘queen,’ but to animal lovers, you are a court jester,” the letter, attributed to the vice president of PETA, said. “I’m sorry, Aretha, but your furs make you look like a clown. Why not shed the old-fashioned look that adds pounds to your frame and detracts from your beautiful voice?”

NY Times article: A Black Legacy, Wrapped in Fur, January 31, 2019 by Jasmine Sanders



Texture:

Soft, smooth.

Smell:

No smell.

Memory:

I went to a funeral recently. In the South, in the winter time. It was chilly. The men and the women were both wearing furs. *Casket Sharp.*

Confession:

When we were little, we wore coats made of rabbit fur. White rabbit fur.



Cinema:

Remember when Celie in *The Color Purple* is at her father's funeral? It's later in the film. The camera starts at her feet in black heels, pans up slowly to show her wearing red gloves, holding a cigarette. Celie is coping, she is coming into herself. She's wearing this beautiful, expensive-looking mink fur. This is her post-traumatic, redemptive, phoenix look. Classy even.

She finds out from her father's last wife that he has left her a house. She shimmies her shoulders, then runs towards the house in utter jubilation. For a character who was demoralized, objectified, and abused throughout the film, this turn, in this here silk black fur, is a demonstration of access to capital and access to agency through aesthetics. As she springs into her future, her fur turns into wings.

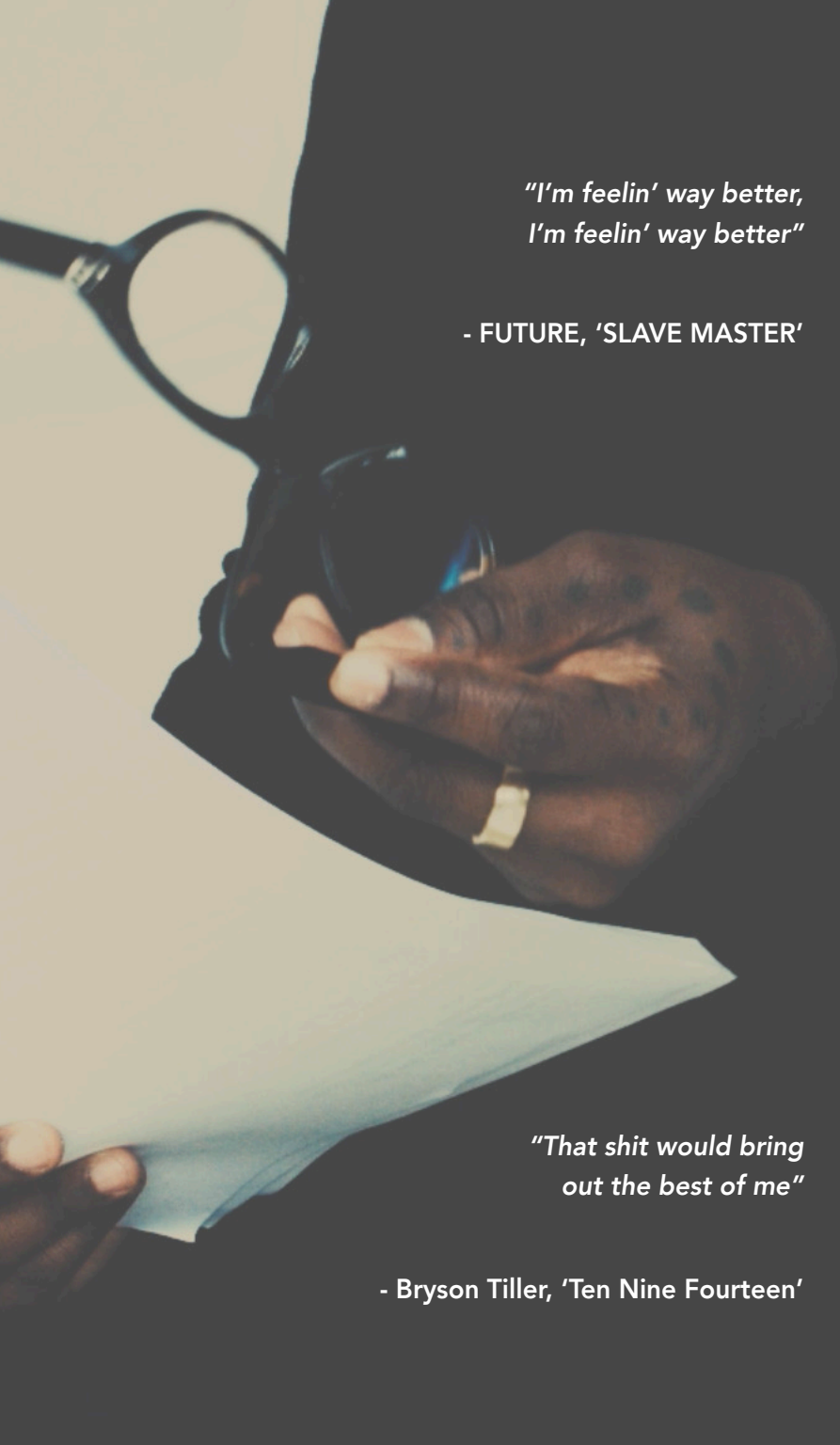
Fur Talking:

Thank you for understanding. Your people/kind have also been hunted, skinned, and used as adornment, as protection from the cold. Your contributions forgotten. Paraded out for company. Used to demonstrate wealth and status. Your life force extinguished because of fear and envy. Are they not the same thing? You understand the idea of having your beauty alternately stunning and disgusting. You know what it is to be taboo. You know what it's like to have once been free.

Part 4



*TRAP AND
TRANSFERENCE*



*"I'm feelin' way better,
I'm feelin' way better"*

- FUTURE, 'SLAVE MASTER'

*"That shit would bring
out the best of me"*

- Bryson Tiller, 'Ten Nine Fourteen'

From website of the American Music Therapy Association:

What Is Music Therapy? Music Therapy is the clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed professional who has completed an approved music therapy program. A well-established healthcare profession, music therapy uses carefully selected music and music interventions to address physical, emotional, cognitive and social needs. While music therapy will not cure or solve problems brought on by crisis, music therapy can help children and adults in crisis learn and use positive coping skills and express difficult feelings and emotions.

Music is a form of sensory stimulation that provokes responses due to the familiarity, predictability and feelings of security associated with it. Music therapy for clients with mental health concerns uses musical interaction as a means of communication and expression. The aim of therapy is to help individuals develop relationships and address issues they may not be able to address using words alone. Music therapy sessions include the use of active music making, music listening, and discussion.

What do Music Therapists Do?

Music therapists use music strategies, both instrumental and vocal, which are designed to facilitate changes that are non-musical in nature. Music selections and certain active music making activities are modified for client preferences and individualized needs (i.e., song selection and music may vary). Music therapy programs are based on individual assessment, treatment planning, and ongoing program evaluation. Clients need not have a music background to benefit from music therapy. Music therapy intervention provides opportunities to: Explore personal feelings and therapeutic issues such as self-esteem or personal insight; Make positive changes in mood and emotional states.

Music therapists utilize music as a therapeutic tool; the genre and type of instrument is tailored to the individual and to the goals that are established between the client and the music therapist. Since music choice/usage is tailored to each client's needs and preferences, there is really no "most common" type of music or instrument. **All styles of music have the potential to be useful in effecting change in a client's or a patient's life.**

*"I've been working hard,
I've been doing better,
ya know"*

- Bryson Tiller, 'Rambo'

"And I got a colorful aura"

- Lil Uzi Vert, 'Neon Guts'
feat. Pharrell Williams

*"This is a marathon
and I'm aware"*

- 21 Savage, 'a lot'
feat. J. Cole

A Note:

The May 5, 2018 episode of *Saturday Night Live* featured a sketch inspired by rap trio Migos in a therapy session. This episode was hosted by rapper and actor, Donald Glover. The fictitious rap group “*Friendos*” (played by Donald Glover, Keenan Thompson and Chris Redd) discussed, with a therapist, (*SNL* cast member Cecily Strong) a number of topics— mostly revelations gleaned from their lyrics. The short skit quickly touched on issues of emotional availability, invisibility, and the importance of maintaining close relationships.

The laughter at the opening of the scene where they enter the therapist’s office is palpable. Is the laughter about the contrast of this white therapist, a rap group going to therapy together, or black people in general seeking out professional analysis and counseling? There is something humorous there. An unidentified discomfort solicits laughter from the viewer.

Q: How can we allow these people to take up a space of healing in their own lives?

Q: Do we need to invoke humor in a thing to desensitize, to soften the blow?

The practice of self-medicating, and the rising rates of suicide among Black Americans are epidemics that have yet to enter a national discourse with the urgency it deserves.

In 2017, I created a 4-minute video work, *Trap and Transference*, with a similar theme— administering advice to someone offscreen (potentially a rapper), using their lyrics as a point of departure. I too, created a work using subtle humor to address the very real and very loaded lyrics of popular songs during that time. The intention in this work was to draw attention to coded messages, cries for a minimal recognition of pain and panic. Is this sketch-based examination used by myself and *SNL* paving the path to a normalization of therapeutic intervention? Possibly. Or possibly not. At the end of this *SNL* sketch, the “*Friendos*” makes a song including the words “breakthrough” and “growth” in the body of a song, as rap lyrics— where the investigation began.

I imagine that this is, at least,
a signal to consumers of
music and pop culture
that there is a desire
to push the
conversation forward.



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Hessel Museum of Art

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Gallery Map

- 1** *Roach Dance*
Autumn Knight
Single channel video
3:51 minutes
2013-2019
Courtesy of the artist

- 2** *Pong!*
Autumn Knight
Video Installation,
single channel video
on loop, paper, light
7:18 minutes
2019
Courtesy of the artist

- 3** *Lincoln and Shoulder Pads*
Autumn Knight and Chelsea Knight
Single channel video
9:49 minutes
2018-2019
Courtesy of the artists

- 4** *Trap and Transference*
Autumn Knight
Single channel video
4:33 minutes
2017-2019
Courtesy of the artist

