

BOMB

"What Is Normal? – Music"



Installation view of Milford Graves: *Fundamental Frequency*, Artists Space, 2021-22. Photo by Filip Wolak. Image courtesy of Artists Space, New York.

The hope of returning to normal is a little dangerous. Hope itself can be limiting, because we cannot know the future, and there is too much desire for salvation. I try very hard to find an equilibrium between instinct and the unknowable. The Milford Graves show at Artists Space celebrates the genius of a man who knew that discernible frequencies are just signals. A rhythm, a beat, a movement: our conscious perceptions of these are the broad strokes of a much more complicated and unseen universe. As a revolutionary jazz percussionist, Graves thwarted the concept of time, releasing it from the metronome. (Early on, his electrifying style spooked some contemporaries, who refused to play with him.) He founded the New York Art Quartet in 1964 and went on to create Yara, his own martial art. He learned acupuncture. He believed in herbalism and tended to a huge garden at his home in Queens. He acquired an EKG to record his and his musician friends' heartbeats, slowing down the data and discovering previously unknown secrets of the heart's life force, of which medical doctors took notice. For decades he was a beloved music professor at Bennington College.

The exhibition presents artworks and artifacts from these excursions, including his sculptures, artwork, and drum kit. When I visited, I felt exhilarated and open—a special feeling to have during this pandemic. I left more convinced than ever of the importance of healing presences and rituals, which Graves explored throughout his life, both for himself and his community.