

# THE NEW YORKER

## "2021 Year in Review: The Year the Art Scene Rebounded, Expanded, and Surrendered to N.F.T.s"



Installation of Milford Graves: *Fundamental Frequency*. Closeup of a framed handwritten note and an archival image. Photograph by Filip Wolak / Courtesy Artists Space

The late Milford Graves, whose joyously profound exhibition *Fundamental Frequency* remains on view through January 8th, at Artists Space, which moved from SoHo to Tribeca late last year, didn't distinguish between percussion, healing, and art—it all came down to vibration. Graves is best known as a free-jazz legend, who played the drums at John Coltrane's funeral. (Fans of the artist Matthew Barney might also recall Graves in the role of one of several Norman Mailers, in Barney's 2014 film *River of Fundament*.) Graves dismissed the Western convention that a good drummer should be a human metronome, because the pulse of the body is polyrhythmic. His interest in heartbeats led to a brief career as a lab technician, before he became a beloved professor at Bennington College for thirty-nine years. But Graves kept heart-monitoring machinery in his studio, for both musical improvisation and medical research. Just months before he died in February, at the age of seventy-nine, Graves was granted U.S. Patent No. 10689623 for the co-invention (with two Italian doctors) of "a method and device for preparing non-embryonic stem cells." He also invented a martial-art form known as Yara, which combines movements derived from West African dance with those of the praying mantis, based on Graves's close observation. (As an herbalist, he maintained an extensive garden at his Queens home.) A hand-painted *Yara Training Bag*, made around 1990, introduces Artists Space's life-giving show, and sets the stage for the bristling, shamanic sculptures that follow, which Graves began to make near the end of his life. Like everything he undertook, they're exceptional.



Another view of Milford Graves: *Fundamental Frequency*. Three outfits hang on the wall to the left, and a projector displays an image on the wall to the right. Photograph by Filip Wolak / Courtesy Artists Space.