

ALDO TAMBELLINI, *WE ARE THE PRIMITIVES OF A NEW ERA*, FROM THE *MANIFESTO* SERIES, 1961, DUCO, ACRYLIC, AND PENCIL ON PAPER, 25 X 30 INCHES.

COVER: ALDO TAMBELLINI, *ELECTROMEDIA ENVIRONMENT*, BLACK GATE THEATER, 1968.

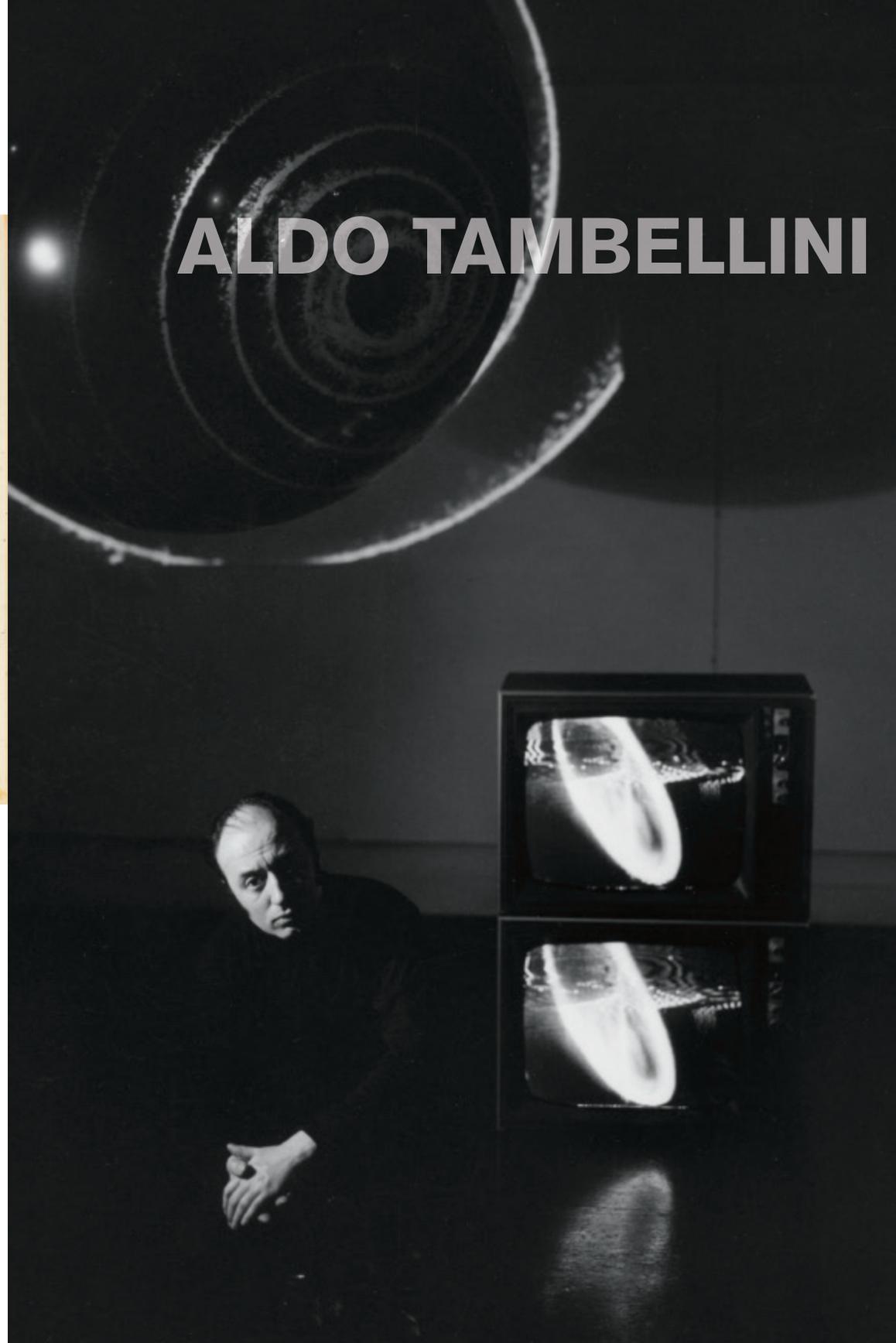
WE ARE THE PRIMITIVES OF A NEW ERA PAINTINGS AND PROJECTIONS 1961-1989

CURATED BY JOSEPH D. KETNER II SEPTEMBER 12 - OCTOBER 19, 2013

JAMES COHAN GALLERY

533 WEST 26TH STREET NEW YORK 10001 TEL 212 714 9500 WWW.JAMESCOHAN.COM

Photo: Ruspoli-Rodriguez



ALDO TAMBELLINI

ALDO TAMBELLINI was a formative figure in expanding art media in the early 1960s. He charted an independent path beginning with paintings and then exploring new technologies—hand-painted slides (*Lumagrams*), films, projections, and video—integrating these media into a new art form that synthesized visual art, theater, music and dance. Critics and artists recognized Tambellini as an originator of visceral, sensory, multimedia installations, “Electromedia,” as he coined it. He performed his events in the parks, schools, and theaters of New York generating a sensation. By the end of the decade he established his own alternative space, “The Black Gate,” in collaboration with Otto Piene, advertised as the only space in New York City devoted to multimedia. An intermedia innovator Tambellini exerted a considerable influence on the succeeding generation of new media artists.

Moving to the lower east side of Manhattan in 1959, Tambellini established a dynamic presence as an artist, activist, and curator of cultural events. By 1961 he was creating a distinctive visual vocabulary of circles and spirals and had settled on his signature color—BLACK. The artist’s swirling black forms were his intuitive responses to the new scientific and social reality of the postwar era. The scientific discoveries in physics and space exploration profoundly affected him, revealing the existence of the atomic and galactic universes, the micro and macro cosmos. Tambellini visualized this duality through the opposites of black and light, the polar forces of nature and the foundation of his visual metaphors. “Black is the beginning. It is birth, the oneness of all, the expansion of consciousness in all directions.” And, “Light is energy, and the same energy which moves through us is the energy which moves through the universe. It is the same energy we have discovered in the atom.”

Tambellini produced the earliest of his iconic graphic circles in the *Manifesto Series*, declaring, *We are the primitives of a new era* (1961). He developed these whirling torrents of energy into the black suns of his *Black Seed of Cosmic Creation* series (1961-62), and in a series of *Untitled* paintings from 1964 the artist instinctively realized the experience of deep space in forms that are reminiscent of planets, galaxies, black holes and solar flares. After a hiatus of nearly two decades, the artist returned to painting in his *Destruction* (1988-89) and *Black Energy Suspended* (1989), series motivated by childhood memories of the war and prompted by the delicate lines of architectural papers.

Tambellini had a moment of creative brilliance in 1963, when he retrieved boxes of discarded slides from the trash, reincarnating them into new artworks. He punched, painted, scratched, and burned these slides, then projected them. His painted projections were literally charged with the energy of light and that he was able present on an enormous scale. He quickly progressed from still slides to moving images in came-

raless films that he described as “paintings in motion.” He combined these media into his “Electromedia” performances that also included avant-garde dancers, poets and musicians, in an abstract theater that the *Village Voice* described as a “theater of the senses” (1965). For the current exhibition Tambellini has created a new multimedia installation—*Black Space*—consisting of 16mm films and *Lumagrams* from the 1960s edited with new sound tracks and poetry projections. The artist orchestrates this ensemble of projectors into an environmental installation that fills the entire gallery—walls and floor—into a sensory experience designed to “dislocate the senses of the viewer,” elevating the Freudian primal impulse into the Kantian sublime.

Tambellini purchased his first Sony Video recorder in 1966. As the principal medium of broadcast television, the artist sought to invert the intended use of video. He began to experiment with broadcast television signals as the source of his images and, working with a team of engineers, rebuilt the cathode ray inside the television set to spray in a spiral, resulting in *Black*

Spiral (1969). In this video Tambellini transformed the light of television into a physical manifestation of the electromagnetic exoskeleton of media culture. He then conceived of the means to capture the electronic energy of the cathode ray on a still image in his *Videograms* (1968 and 1969). The artist placed photographic paper on the television screen and, turning the set on, then immediately off, exposed the paper to the rays. This process produces unique cameraless photographs that materialize electromagnetic energy.

MIT invited Tambellini to be a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Visual Studies (1976-1984), where he continued to work in video, broadcast television, and satellite communication, what he considers “the medium of the future.” He has continued to pursue his synthetic interest in new media to the present day and is experiencing a revival of interest in his work with film screenings, installations and performances at the Harvard Film Archives (2010), the Centre Pompidou (2012) and at the Tate Tanks (2012).

ALDO TAMBELLINI, *BLACK ZERO* PERFORMANCE, 2012, TATE TANKS, TATE MODERN, LONDON.



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