Aldo Tambellini

11 March – 6 August 2017

Black MATTERS
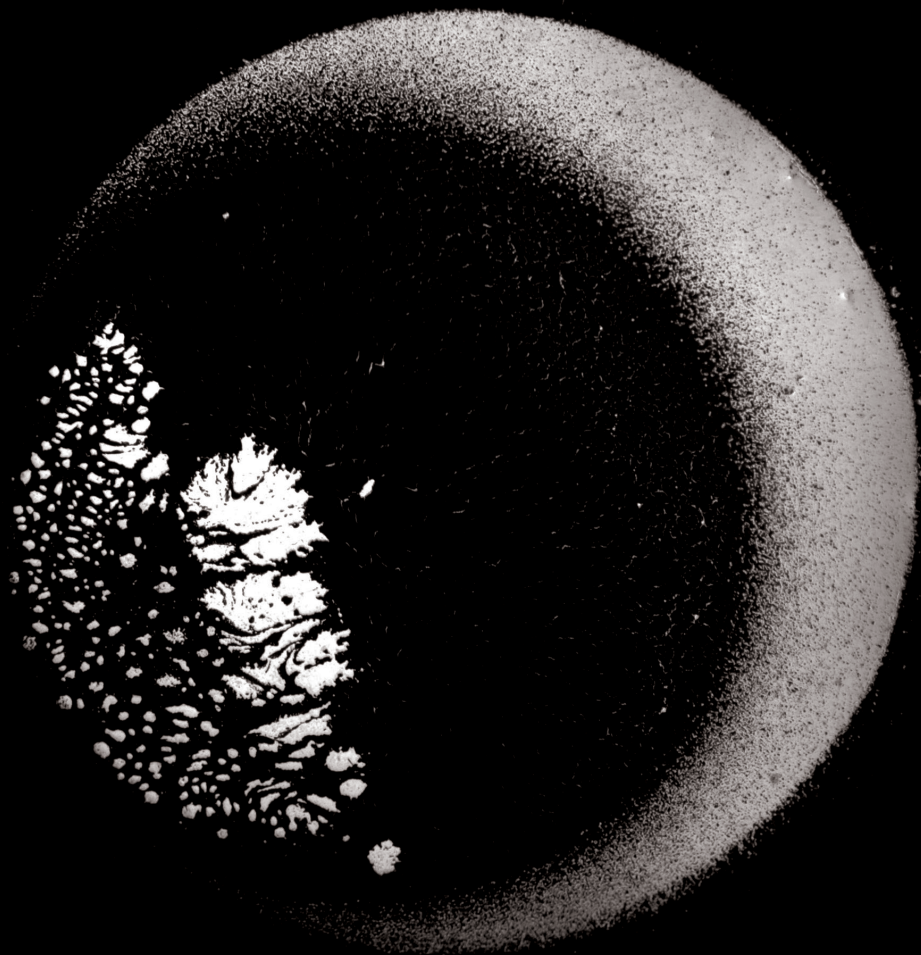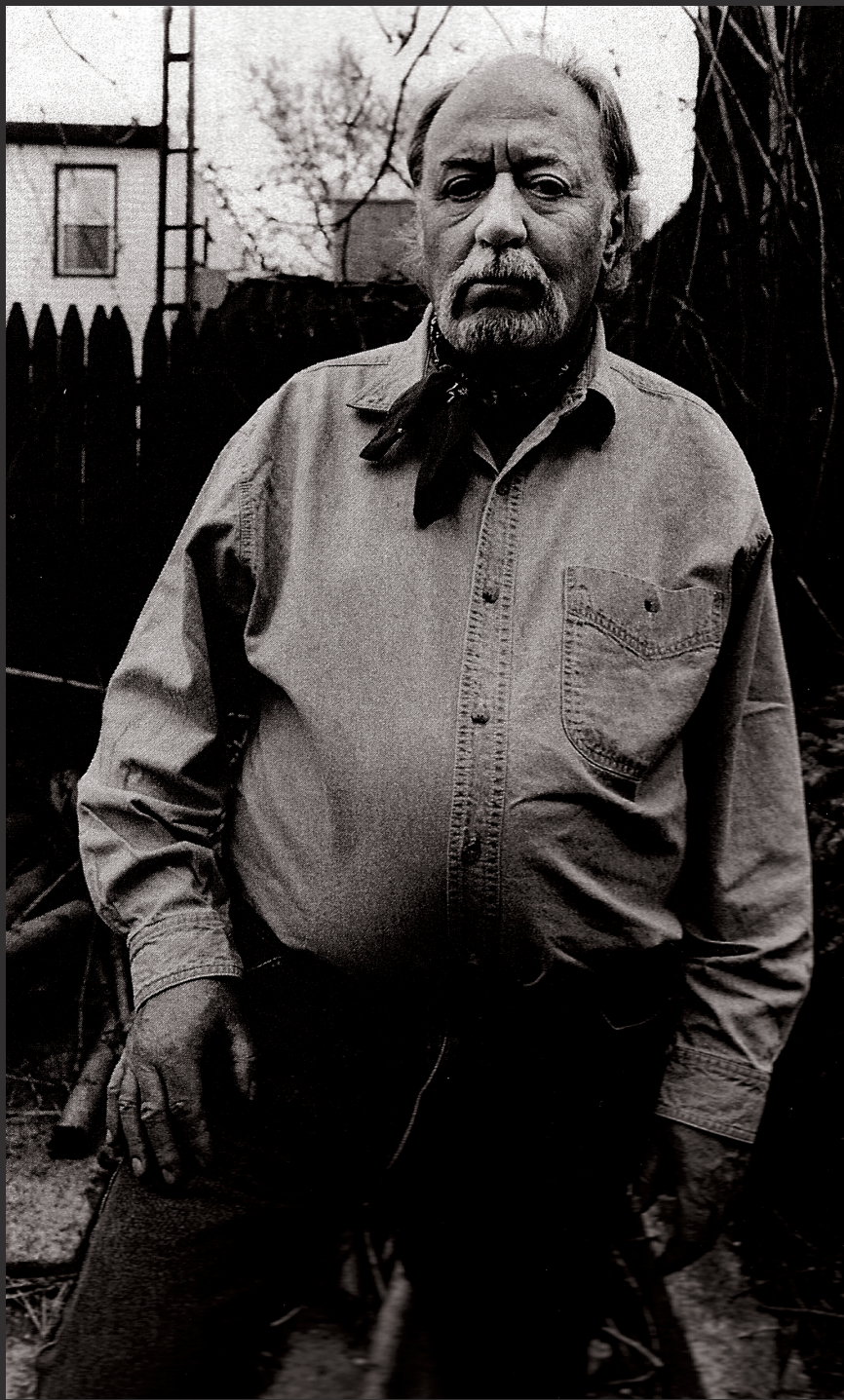
Introduction

As a key figure in the 1960s underground scene of New York – a missing link between the European avant-garde and the artistic movements that followed Abstract Expressionism – Aldo Tambellini (born 1930 in Syracuse, NY, US) is an experimenter, agitator, and a major catalyst of innovation in the field of multimedia art. Tambellini took the transformational potential of artistic expression that stems from painting and sculpture and brought it to the experiences of Expanded Cinema.

After his early experiments with color in the 1950s, the artist embraced *BLACK* as an artistic, philosophical, social, and political commitment, and started to use mainly this color in his works. The American Civil Rights Movement and the struggle for racial equality, the Vietnam War, and the space-age were influences on his visionary oeuvre, unique in that it demonstrates the fragile balance between an artist's absorption of the stimuli provided by contemporary new technologies and the social and political environment of his time. Attracted above all by the energetic nature of painting, Tambellini transferred a meticulous expression of the language and power of gesture – first onto slides, and later onto film frames and video. Over the course of the 1960s he created his *Black Project* from which emerged: the *Black Film Series,* 16 mm films focused on philosophical and social facets of black; the *Black Performances,* multimedia performances he called "Electromedia" which are based on his theories of the integration of the arts; the *Black Video Series* and *Black TV,* which took his mode of experimentation further into video and television technologies.

The body of work presented at ZKM | Karlsruhe in this first major solo exhibition of Tambellini, is conceived as a manifesto for an organic connection between painting, sculpture, photography, moving images, poetry, and performance. His vision encompasses the full implications of contemporary media, seizing upon their potential as linguistic and artistic tools.
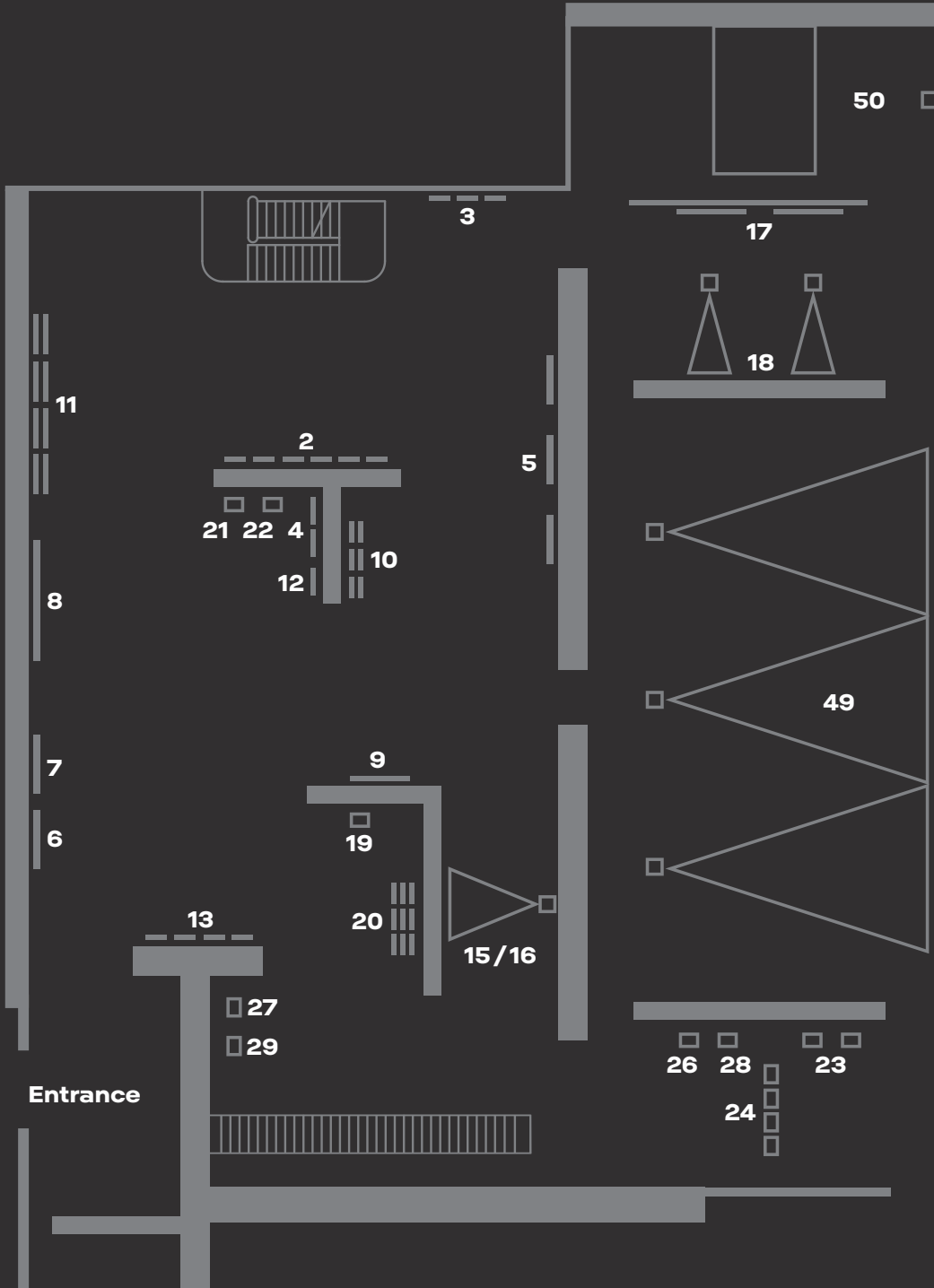
Black Matters, for which the ZKM | Laboratory for Antiquated Video Systems digitized the entire video archive of the artist, is a journey through Aldo Tambellini's most prolific, highly charged, and diversified period from 1960 to 1980. The exhibition presents a selection of paintings rarely seen before from his New York period, as well as films and videos which marked the artist's sucess in the 1960s and 1970s. Another section is devoted to the experiments and projects conducted by Tambellini's Communicationsphere at Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) Center for Advanced Visual Studies (CAVS) and a selection of his most recent multimedia works that were shown at Centre Pompidou in Paris (2012), Tate Modern in London (2012), MoMA in New York (2013), and the 56th Venice Biennale (2015).

Concluding this journey through the development of this artistic life in these crucial decades is a site-specific installation especially commissioned for this retrospective. This new multimedia work, once again after sixty years, presents Tambellini's artistic investigations, philosophical underpinning, and his political belief that "Black Matters", now more than ever.

Pia Bolognesi and Giulio Bursi

Floorplan
ZKM_Atrium 1+2, ground floor

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Entrance

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35–48

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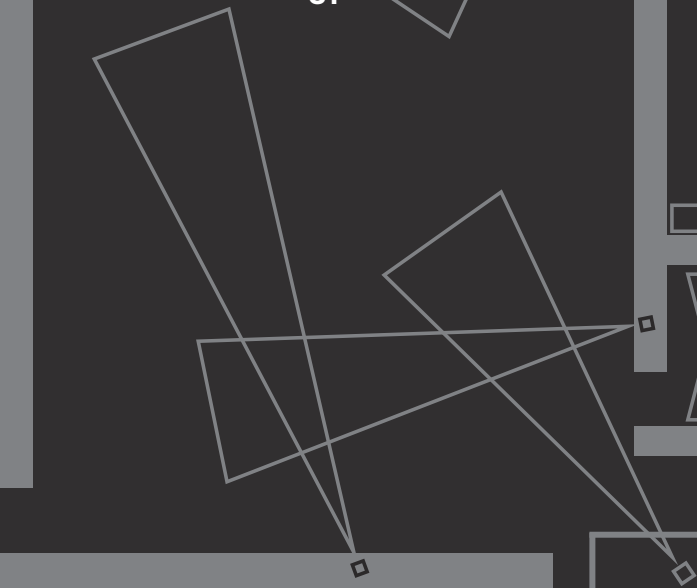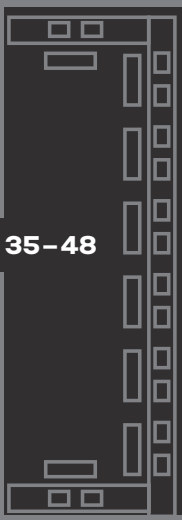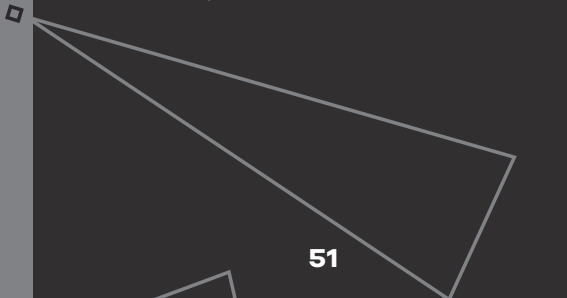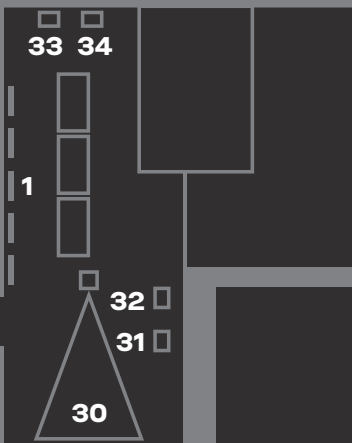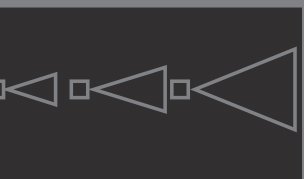
Black,
& before the beginning was black before the beginning

Aldo Tambellini, 1962

Black to me is like a beginning. A beginning of what it wants to be rather than what it does not want to be. I am not discussing black as a tradition or non-tradition in painting or as having anything to do with pigment or as an opposition to color. As I am working and exploring black in different kinds of dimensions, I'm definitely more and more convinced that black is actually the beginning of everything, which the art concept is not.

Black gets rid of the historical definition.

Black is the state of being blind and more aware. Black is the oneness of birth, black which is within totally the oneness of all. Black is the expansion of consciousness in all directions. I believe very strongly that the completely artificial "art" concept and the concept of "non-art" will have to collapse for the very reason they are both on the wrong track. Black is one of the important reasons why the radical conflicts are happening today, because it is part of an old way to look at the human being or race in terms of color. We oppose black. Black will get rid of the separation of color at the end. Blackness is the beginning of the re-sensitizing of human beings. I'm a strong believer that the word "black power" is a powerful message, for it destroys the old notion of western man, and by destroying that notion it also destroys the tradition of the art concept. Aldo Tambellini, interview, *Arts Canada*, issue on BLACK, 10/1967

B   Aldo Tambellini, *To Be Enveloped by Black*, 1964 ● Photo: Jonas Zilius
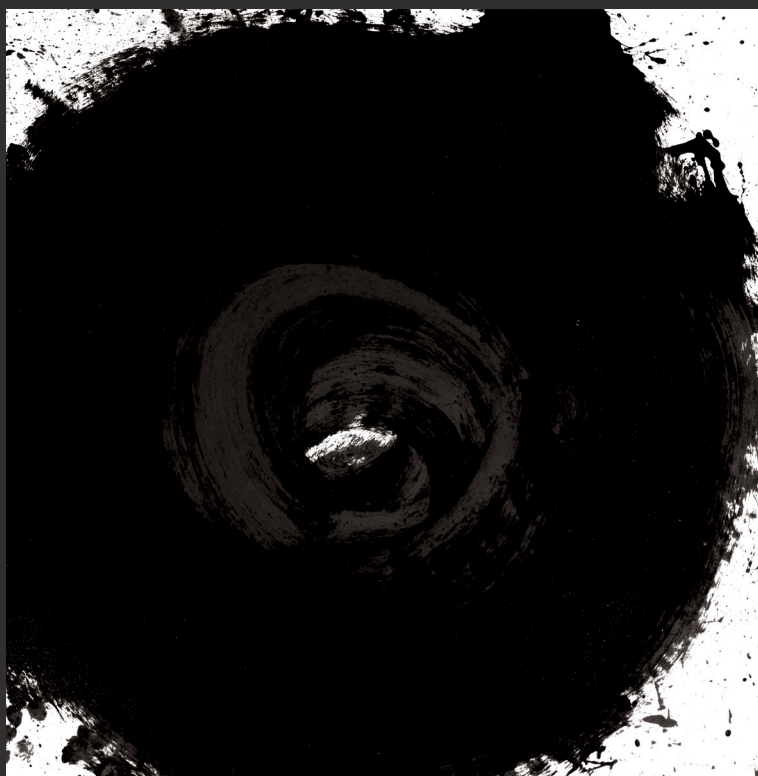
Paintings

the circle-the sphere-the spiral-the void-
suspension-space-tension
the black-mysterious matter
the sphere of oneness
connecting us all

TO THE BASIC QUESTION
what generates life
what is structure in nature
what are the basic universal forms
where does it all go back to
where do we go from here
who are we

from amoeba
to nucleus
to sperm
to atom
to cells
to planets
to solar systems
to galaxies
to the expanding contracting universe
FROM THE INVISIBLE MADE VISIBLE
to the mystery revealed by man
back to the question
to the origins
the roots
the seed
the arrival is at the constant process
of giving birth
of not knowing
arriving is a point of never arriving

to be enveloped by black
to be enveloped by black
to be enveloped by black
to be enveloped by black
to be

Aldo Tambellini, n.d.

1   Aldo Tambellini, *Poetry Posters,* 1960–1961 ● Ink on poster paper, two works: 73,7 × 58,4 cm and 58,4 × 73,7 cm, three works: each 88,9 × 58,4 cm ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

2   Aldo Tambellini, *The Manifesto Series*, 1961 ● Duco and pencil on paper / duco on paper, six works: each 97,8 × 64,8 cm ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

3   Aldo Tambellini, *The Destruction Series*, 1961 ● Graphite and wax with perforations and dust on cardboard / graphite on cardboard with incisions and burns, one work: Ø 75,9 cm, two works: each 71,2 × 91,5 cm ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

4 Aldo Tambellini, *The Seed of the Cosmic Creation Series,* 1961 ● Duco and sand on paper / duco and graphite on paper, two works: each 63,5 × 48,3 cm ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

5 Aldo Tambellini, *Untitled Series,* 1961 ● Duco on paper, three works: Ø each 151,3 cm ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

6 Aldo Tambellini, *Eclipse*, 1962 ● Duco and enamel on canvas, 235,6 × 236,2 cm ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

7 Aldo Tambellini, *The Strobe*, 1962 ● Duco and enamel on canvas, strobe light, ball, 233 × 231,2 cm ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

8 Aldo Tambellini, *The Echo*, 1962 ● Duco and enamel on canvas, diptych, each 200,7 × 204,5 cm ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

9 Aldo Tambellini, *Black Infinity*, 1962 ● Duco on canvas, 178 × 169 cm ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

10 Aldo Tambellini, *Untitled Series 2*, 1962 ● Duco on paper, six works: each 35,6 × 66 cm ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

11 Aldo Tambellini, *To Be Enveloped by Black,* 1964 ● Duco, acrylic and sand on paper / duco on paper / duco and sand on paper, eight works: each 89 × 89 cm ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

12 Aldo Tambellini, *Black,* 1965 ● Program poster for the first performance of *Black* at International House, Columbia University, New York, January 6, 1965 ● Ink on paper, 88,9 × 55,9 cm ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

D Aldo Tambellini at the *Sculpture and Drawing Show,* grounds of St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery, New York, 1963 ● Photo: Don Snyder

C Photographic essay on Aldo Tambellini's sculptures, 1962 ● Photo: Don Snyder

Sculpture

I had developed my own method of making sculpture by using sand to cast hydrocal, so I needed a space on the ground floor. I found a single storefront at 217 East 2nd Street near Avenue C for $60 a month. My companion Elsa and I loaded all of our belongings onto a rented push cart and, making several trips at night, we moved. The neighborhood looked tough. I had several skulls and bones from cows and hung them on the front store window together with one of my early sculptures, which was coated with black tar. I lit the whole thing with candles. It was a strange voodoo-like sight in the night. In today's terminology it would probably be considered the earliest installation by an artist in that area. With the help of some Puerto Rican teenagers, we fenced in the empty lot outside of the storefront facing Houston Street, creating an outdoor studio for my sculpture. It's now 1961–1962. This space was filled in with my concave and round sculptures of hydrocal coated with epoxy to waterproof them. This became the outdoor exhibit available to the neighborhood. Concurrently, I was working very intensely on painting, black enamel or black acrylic on paper, some of them cut out in the shape of a circle. I worked with the blowtorch burning large pieces of wood, sometimes applying some paint.

Aldo Tambellini, ABC-TV, December 21, 1968

13   Photographic essay on Aldo Tambellini's sculptures, 1962 ● Photos: Don Snyder ● Selection of 24 b/w photographs, each 25,4 × 35,5 cm or 35,5 × 25,4 cm ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

Film

I approach film as a direct medium. Working directly on 16 mm, my basic method is as follows: a way to produce light images by taking away – a way to produce images by adding to. I do not try to imitate the form made by the camera; I try to bring out the unique qualities which are inherent in the film itself – the celluloid and the emulsion. The approach is completely open where anything and everything is possible as long as it is technically printable. To get down to the essentials: light and motion.

How intense is the intensity of light?
How many images of blackness in a second?
How many sounds in a pulsation of light?
How does an instant of film span a trillion?
How black is the blackness?

Aldo Tambellini, n.d.

Black TV

Black TV makes use of the 1960s television footage of social/political news items taped and played back on the TV monitor then shot with a 16 mm camera at various speeds. This film was edited as a split screen film.

The shortest and most compact version was the one presented at the Oberhausen Film Festival. Since my interest is in multimedia and mixed-media live events and in experimental TV programs, I think of film as a material to work with, part of the communication media rather than as an ultimate in itself. In the future we will be communicating through electronically transmitted images and *Black TV* is about the future, the contemporary American, the media, the injustice, the witnessing of events, and the expansion of the senses.

Aldo Tambellini, n.d.

Black TV
this is the news:
time is shooting from the video gun
images are bullets targeting the screen
TV the assassin of reality is a weapon pointed at your mind
the sixties have passed/recorded/obliterated/
                                            stored/erased
death/starvation/riots/assassinations/moon landing/
                                bombs/choppers/astronauts
familiar images stored in the videodisk of the mind
                                            recalled

Black TV begins with the beam turning on
the white noise the electronic snow
Black TV ends with the beam going off
to black

Aldo Tambellini, *Black TV* statement, 1981

Aldo Tambellini, *Black TV*, 1968 ● 2-channel 16 mm film installation, b/w, sound, 10 min. ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA & Harvard Film Archive, Cambridge, MA

Burn Black

Fire is a form of energy and its combustion a release of energy. It is all part of a natural process of creation. My notebooks of 1961 to 1967 have many ideas, notes, and sketches about projects with fire, or sculptures involved with natural elements. My sculptures were spherical, round, related to planet form, organic forms, and it was natural that they would be involved with natural elements.

There seems to be a persistency about sculptural projects, about fire scattered through pages filled with ideas, poems, curses about the injustice of American social conditions and among all that the persistent re-occurrence of projects with fire, kinetic discs compressing and expanding through blades of fire, concave spheres in spinning motion shooting from opening internal fire, fire and combustion inside earth forms, fire pushing through some split opening or fire burning inside two connecting oval fiber-glass translucent shapes slowly being filled in by smoke becoming clear then repeating the fill-in process again. Fire and Black. The stars burn best on a black night.

Aldo Tambellini, n.d.

15   Aldo Tambellini, *Burn Black*, 1965–1968 ● 16 mm film, digitized, b/w, no sound, 4 min. ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

16   Aldo Tambellini, *Black Round*, 1965-1968 ● 16 mm film, digitized, b/w, no sound, 10 min. ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

Lumagrams

In 1963, I found a group of 35 mm photographic slides, which had been rejected but not discarded. I took these slides and instinctively sprayed black paint on some of them; scratched round forms into the emulsion; and perforated some of them, piercing them with pins and other implements. I projected these slides onto the façade of the building across the street from a tenement rooftop on 6th Street and Avenue D using a Kodak Carousel Projector. Once projected, I saw the similarity to my paintings. This marked the beginning of my involvement with multimedia. I then began to paint similar images on glass slides. I called these slides "lumagrams."

Aldo Tambellini, statement on film from notes, 2010

17   Aldo Tambellini, *Black Light*, 1966–1967 • Lumagrams (hand-painted slides), duco, gel, ink, glue on glass, 80 slides: each 6,8 × 6,8 cm, 125 slides: each 5,1 × 5,1 cm • Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

18   Aldo Tambellini, *Black Light*, 1966–1967 • From the *Gel* series and the *Moondial* series • Lumagrams (hand-painted slides), duplicated on 35 mm positive film, double projection, 80 slides each carousel • Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

Videograms

"Videograms" are unique photo images made without the use of a camera. I invented this photographic method and coined the title of "Videogram" in 1968. I made two series. The first series (1968) was done by using a television and capturing the immediate moment of the beam going off on photosensitive paper. The second series (1969) are photographic images captured from a modified TV sculpture called *Black Spiral*. Each image is a unique and one of a kind print.

The videograms were exhibited for the first time with other works about television including a multimedia program and *Black Spiral*, a modified TV sculpture, in 1970 at the *Vision & Television Show*, Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Massachusetts.   **Aldo Tambellini, description, notebook about TV, 1981**

19   Aldo Tambellini, *Black Spiral*, 1969 • 16 mm film, digitized, b/w, sound, 5:34 min. • Installed in the restored original TV set • Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA & James Cohan Gallery, New York

20   Aldo Tambellini, *Videogram*, 1968–1969 • Videograms on photo paper, nine videograms: each 39,5 × 50,2 cm • Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA & James Cohan Gallery, New York

Black Video I

Being aware of the power of television, I never owned a TV set until I purchased one of the earliest video recorders, a camera and a tripod.

The very first day I made these purchases, I proceeded to produce my very first videotape, *Black Video I*. It was a tape made by shining lights directly into the video camera. These lights slowly began to burnout the vidicon leaving permanent black spots that showed on the recorded tape. The live audio feed-
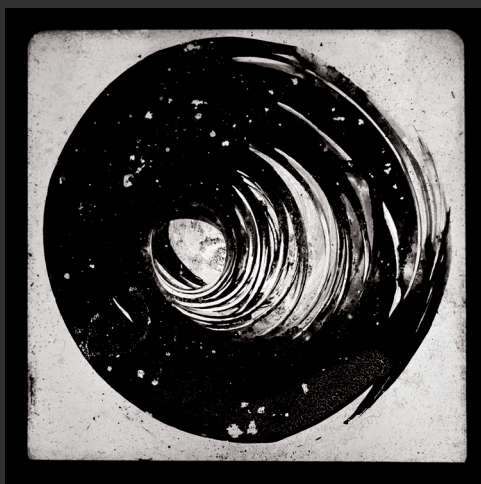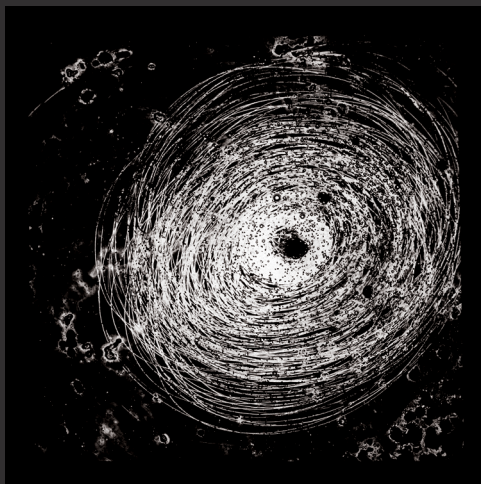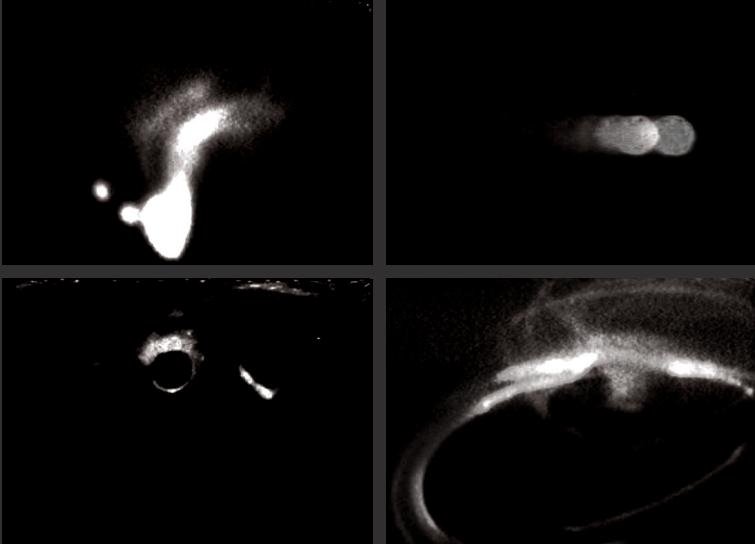
F   Aldo Tambellini, *Black Light*, 1966–1967

back was interfering with the video images causing the breaks and dropouts that are seen. These are intentionally part of the expression.   **Aldo Tambellini, n.d.**

21   Aldo Tambellini, *Black Video I*, 1966 ● Video, digitized, b/w, sound, 24:18 min. ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA & James Cohan Gallery, New York

G © Aldo Tambellini, *Black Video I*, 1966

Black Video II

My direction was to arrive at TV as a light/sound instrument capable of modifying existing images on tape. My questions were answered by the next collaborative project with Ken Wise.

There are two parts of this collaboration. One was the making of the electronic video tape, *BLACK VIDEO TAPE 2*, which was a result of several improvisational sessions between myself, Ken Wise (an electronic engineer from SONY), and other electronic technicians. There seems to have been some natural feedback between Ken Wise and myself, for we responded to each other intuitively from the beginning. I pushed the electronic equipment to a maximum intensity of light and a vidicon was burned, but I was after speed AND light. After several days and several joint improvisational sessions, *BLACK VIDEO TAPE 2* was completed.

My relationship to Ken and the other engineers resulted in some get-together sessions, one of which was taped and published in *Arts Canada*'s issue on "Impermanency."

My direction has been to arrive at TV as a light/sound instrument capable of modifying existing images on tape. My questions were answered by the next collaborative project which Ken produced, the special control box capable of modifying the existing tape image in several ways, both influenced by sound or light.   **Aldo Tambellini, n.d.**

22   Aldo Tambellini, *Black Video II*, 1966 ● Video, digitized, b/w, sound, 10:53 min. ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA & James Cohan Gallery, New York

Ken Dewey Memorial

It was a shock hearing how Ken Dewey crashed his own-made airplane, the same plane he had exhibited at the Avant-Garde Festival at the Old Armory in 1972 in New York.

The Dewey family, related to John Dewey, former Governor of New York, invited several of us artists who knew Ken to create a work as a memorial to him. We knew Ken as an artist and his family, to our surprise, had no idea about his involvement in the arts.

Unbeknown to me, I used Ken's personal canoe, mounted the recorder and the video camera on the bow of the canoe and tied these down with two ropes to the sides. I improvised a trip on a stream of the family farm. The canoe trip was being recorded by the video camera on the reel-to-reel black and white tape during this slow trip. Later I realized that it was a ceremonial journey similar to the Egyptian tradition of the trip of the dead. I also recorded the other performances: Nam June Paik played the piano outside while Yoko Ono did a silent dramatic movement expressing agony, even John Lennon was present.

Aldo Tambellini, n.d.

23 Aldo Tambellini, *Ken Dewey Memorial*, September 16, 1972 • 2-channel video, digitized, b/w, sound, 6 min. • Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

H Aldo Tambellini, *Ken Dewey Memorial*, September 16, 1972

TV about TV

This work, consisting of four different videos, captures a slice of time, a specific moment in broadcast TV and cable, using all the available channels. The chosen location in respect to how the television broadcast is viewed and also the context changes – either marking the day before a specific event (as in The Day of the Moon Landing), the day of an actual event (like the Inauguration 1981), or a historical moment (capturing the Royal Wedding of Prince Charles and Diana). TV is allowed to speak for itself

through its programming. I simply switched the dial and edited the final product. Each tape in the series is unique in its representation of TV. In most cases the editing is linear.

<div align="right">Aldo Tambellini, n.d.</div>

24 Aldo Tambellini, *TV about TV*, 1972–1982 ● 4-channel video installation, digitized, color, sound ● Channel 1: The Day before the Moon Landing, 46:44 min. ● Channel 2: Inauguration 81, 31:57 min. ● Channel 3: Royal Wedding, 24:06 min. ● Channel 4: March 27, 1980 from 8:00 pm to 1:00 am, 14:31 min. ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

Atlantic in Brooklyn Morning Noon and Night

Soon after Tambellini moved to Brooklyn in 1971, an eye infection left his corneas severely scarred. Haunted by the fear of going blind and ending in complete darkness, he decided to record the world as seen from the windows of his apartment at the intersection of Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues, which became *Atlantic in Brooklyn.* He improvised several poems into an audio recorder and picked up his then new SONY Portapak video recording system to document the images outside his window which he might never see again. *Atlantic in Brooklyn* began in June 1971 when Tambellini moved into a loft overlooking Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn. All the action takes place at an intersection where several streets and avenues meet. The tapes were shot from his fourth floor window except for one tape which was shot from the roof. There is no other editing except for the in-camera editing.

"*Atlantic in Brooklyn Morning Noon and Night,* Atlantic on Sunday, weekdays. Atlantic under brilliant sun. Atlantic on a windy day. Atlantic under the rain. People, cars, trucks, a hamburger stand, a bank building with a large round clock always at the hour of 10. Occasional prostitutes crossing the street, occasional pimps, drunken people in and out of bars and always the police." (Tambellini) This area of Brooklyn was slated for urban renewal and the neighborhood and its life was soon destined to disappear.

Atlantic in Brooklyn was first shown at The Kitchen Video Festival, New York, on June 19, 1972. It was originally presented with four video recorders, one live camera, one audio cassette player, and eight monitors.

<div align="right">n.n., n.d.</div>

25 Aldo Tambellini, *Atlantic in Brooklyn Morning Noon and Night*, 1971–1972 / 2015 ● 6-channel video installation, digitized, b/w, sound ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

Clone

Clone creates a non-narrative sensory experience where TV images repeat, cloning themselves sometimes with mutations. It incorporates my first videotape (1967); TV coverage of the parallel bars competition and of the diving sequence from the Olympics in Montréal, which made reference to the classic Leni Riefenstahl 1938 documentary *Olympia.*

Suspension and anti-gravity are evident throughout *Clone* – from the circular motion of the light shining in dark space to the divers captured suspended in mid-air and to the gymnasts flying from one parallel bar to the other. My interest in space travel and exploration is evidenced in the inclusion of the television broadcast of the first module landing and scanning of Mars.

The sound in *Clone* is the live interaction between my heavy breathing into a microphone, the modulation of my voice and audio feedback. *Clone* incorporated those elements of media usually edited out, considered not appropriate for viewing: German film leader, the rough breakup from the in-camera edits, and noise on the tape.

Aldo Tambellini, n.d.

26   Aldo Tambellini, *Clone*, 1976 ● Video, digitized, b/w and color, sound, 41:38 min. ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

I   Aldo Tambellini, *Clone*, 1976

Minus 1

This videotape was originally made in the television studio in Rochester, NY on a 2-inch Quad broadcast tape in 1969 with a grant from the New York State Council of the Arts as part of a program series which was produced and aired by New York State Educational Television. I created a live event in the television studio using an urban classroom of children and my films and videos. The sound was the children's spontaneous songs mixed with the repeated countdown of a rocket launching; the conversation between the astronauts and Mission Control and U.S. troops engaged in battle in the Vietnam War. This tape is shown as a non-scripted improvisation.

The studio environment and the children were bombarded by media.

Aldo Tambellini, n.d.

27   Aldo Tambellini, *Minus 1*, 1969 ● Video, digitized, b/w, sound, 17:21 min. ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

6673

It was difficult to find labs where I could make copies of my first tape; however, I found a place near LaGuardia Airport called Video Flight. They agreed to copy my tape. And while they were doing this I saw test patterns and other electronic images on the monitors that excited me. I spoke with the young engineers and decided to collaborate with them, returning to make a second tape of the electronic images. This manipulation of the test patterns became my second tape. The sound heard on the tape was from an oscilloscope, which I controlled, and through the sound I manipulated the images; later in the tape there is the sound of my own voice improvising as I reacted to the images. In 1973, Public Television in New York City, Channel 13, opened a new television lab and gave some artists access to it. The 55-minute black and white tape from 1966 described above was reprocessed in 1973 at Channel 13 using the Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer; thus the title *6673*.

Aldo Tambellini, n.d.

28   Aldo Tambellini, *6673*, 1966–1973 ● Video, digitized, color, sound, 49:11 min. ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

Black from: The Medium Is the Medium

If we would face that kind of reality, that all those visions which astronauts have seen, which scientists are seeing, that they are part if life – that your cells are growing and changing and moving – that we must become transparent and see through all of this and see through all of the reality of the injustice of the brutality which man perpetrates on man – that we are surrounded by events which you, a flat one dimensional human being, try not to be aware of and if I could say to a human being, that your mind is open and your mind can be expanded; your mind can go in many places and time; your mind can go to the moon and Harlem faster than the speed that I can think – then we are getting closer to what I am trying to say.

Aldo Tambellini, interview, *The Medium Is the Medium*, WGBH-TV, Boston, MA. 2/1969

29   Aldo Tambellini, *Black* from *The Medium Is the Medium*, 1969 ● 16 mm film, digitized, b/w, sound, 4:33 min. ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

Black Gate Cologne
**Light play by Aldo Tambellini and Otto Piene, August 30, 1968.**

In his part, Aldo Tambellini's intention was to experience television as a medium itself and to create a direct relationship between audience and the characteristic elements of TV in a ritual involvement of the senses.

We must make a new world through communication
communication as human as beings as people as space
as nature as the living plant as the sound as the light image
that passes in the speed of an idea

Moscow Peking Cologne New York
we are there in the flash of a thought
you and I and all that black space that's what we do
tomorrow in Cologne and friday – *BLACK GATE COLOGNE*

Aldo Tambellini, from notebook, *Black Gate Cologne*, TV program WDR, Cologne, Germany, October 1968 while in flight between New York City and Cologne.

Aldo Tambellini and Otto Piene, Black Gate Cologne, August 30, 1968
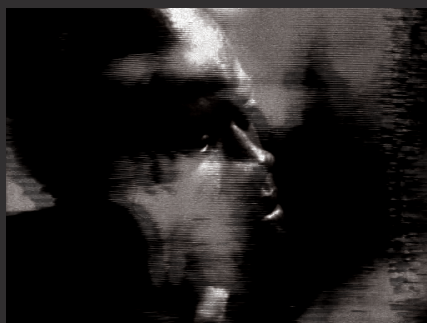
The visual information came from an electronic image from a video film, abstracted images from American TV, a videotape, and hand-painted slide projections. As many as six different types of visual information were fed at once into the twelve TV monitors while a multitude of TV images were projected simultaneously on the walls with the slides. The studio TV cameras, with zooms, close-ups, and panning, moved from the audience, to monitors, to films, to slides, and to me, who in the midst of all the activity was filming the event. In the control room the simultaneous visual information was constantly mixed and juxtaposed, creating an intense continuous experience of light, energy, and sound. The final mix, recorded as a videotape, was simultaneously seen on one of the four monitors, creating a total experience. *Black Gate Cologne* lasted 45 minutes. The tape of the live performance will be broadcast on WDR (West German Broadcasting Cologne), a cultural TV channel in Germany. Aldo Tambellini, n.d.

30   Aldo Tambellini, Otto Piene, *Black Gate Cologne*, August 30, 1968 ● Video, digitized, b/w, sound, 46:59 min. ● ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe Collection

31   Aldo Tambellini, *Black Gate Cologne*, 1968 ● Documentation ● 16 mm film, digitized, b/w, no sound, 13:57 min. ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA & Harvard Film Archive, Cambridge, MA

32   Aldo Tambellini, *Black Gate Dusseldorf*, 1968 ● Documentation ● 16 mm film, digitized, b/w, no sound, 7:46 min. ● Courtesy: Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA & Harvard Film Archive, Cambridge, MA

33   Jud Yalkut, *Moondial*, 1966 ● Performance *Moondial* by Aldo Tambellini, ● 16 mm film, digitized, b/w, sound, 3:52 min. ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

34   Aldo Tambellini, *Proliferation of the Sun / Blackout*, 1967 ● Performance *Proliferation of the Sun* by Otto Piene, performance *Blackout* by Aldo Tambellini ● 16 mm film, digitized, b/w, no sound, 6:26 min. ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA & Harvard Film Archive, Cambridge, MA

Communicationsphere

we live in a reality defined by the structural invention of the mass media-printed & electronic images are the building blocks of our cultural evolution.

new imaging systems are being invented.
new storage capabilities are being invented.
new delivery capabilities are being invented.
reality is being reinvented

the industrial revolution is followed by the communication revolution the complex technologies of communication and information systems are expanding and redefining the academic context of modern art
there are elements of continuity from art into the telecommunication society – but we have to get out of the museum environment in an imaginary trip to the galaxies to discover the origin of art
I was recently asked by the new provost at MIT – "Why is telecommunication art?" Confronted with the question I was suddenly given a short history of the media – communication and the arts – as if the natural interaction among them had happened a long time ago and the expansion of the arts into the area of global telecommunications was its natural continuation
the interaction of the traditional mode of art with photography – film television – the picturephone – holography – CATV – slow scan – facsimile – and more complex and recent interfacing of television systems with the computer and videodisk as an evolution in the sensory environment technological society are a part of the continuum of the sensory environment once communicated by the artist through paintings in caves and
cathedrals
telecommunication uses the electromagnetic spectrum as a natural resource of communication the way cave people used rock formations as a natural resource or the totem carver used the trees in the forest – telecommunication may back art to its original source – to its instinctive primeval energy
the creative use of telecommunication should reach out towards a globally conscious society with its unique properties – interactive sys-

tems – communication satellites – microwave relay – retrieval systems and remote sensing

it is the natural capability of media to grab a frame from a moment in time – closing the line between life and art with many live remote places interacting at a given time

Méliès' film *A Trip to the Moon* of 1902, a classic work of art, finds itself a reality in 1968 when the astronauts land on the moon: the live event is transformed into a spectacular art event through the structure created in the NASA control room shared by a global audience

Art becoming life – life becoming art – art and life becoming closer via telecommunication

Let's propose that artists share and participate in building the expanding network which is in the process of teleconnecting the solar system; a network which should evolve as a creative resource bringing humanity into COMMUNICATIONSPHERE.

Aldo Tambellini, MIT, CAVS, Cambridge, MA, July 4, 1980

35   Aldo Tambellini, *Communicationsphere*, 1981 ● Video, digitized, color, sound, 19:10 min. ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

36   Aldo Tambellini, *Interface*, 1981 ● 16 mm film, digitized, color, sound, 25:43 min. ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

37   Ira Schneider, *TV as a Creative Medium*, 1969/2009 ● Video, digitized, b/w, sound, 11:40 min. ● Courtesy Ira Schneider

38   WYNYS-TV Syracuse, *Interview Syracuse TV – Community Forum*, 1984 ● Video, digitized, color, sound, 28:58 min. ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

39   Aldo Tambellini, *Ken Dewey Memorial*, September 16, 1972 ● Documentation ● Video, digitized, b/w, sound, 27:05 min. ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

40   Aldo Tambellini, *3 Artists In 3 Countries*, June 9, 1980 ● Video, digitized, color, sound, 15 min. ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

41   Aldo Tambellini, *Artists' Use of Telecommunication*, February 16, 1980 ● Video, digitized, color, sound, 22:46 min. ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

42   Aldo Tambellini, *Black Zero*, 1968 ● 16 mm film, digitized, b/w, no sound 5:41 min. ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

43   Aldo Tambellini, *Charlotte Moorman Interview*, June 29, 1973 ● Video, digitized, b/w, sound, 32:42 min. ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

44   Aldo Tambellini, *Pittsburgh in 10 Minutes*, 1984 ● Video, digitized, color, sound, 14:47 min. ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

45   Aldo Tambellini, *Slow Scan*, October 19, 1980 ● 2-channel video, digitized, b/w and color, sound, 51:27 min. and 1:01:52 h ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

46   Aldo Tambellini, *Tele-Sky*, 1981 ● Video, digitized, b/w, sound, 5:53 min. ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

Picturephone Chicago Sonia Sheridan

We are heading towards a world that is transparent, where communication is spontaneous transmitting our very thoughts instantaneously- through distance you are a consumer of mediaa cow grazing on its grass

Aldo Tambellini, spontaneous reaction during *Chicago Bell Picture- phone event* by Communicationsphere, Chicago, June 6, 1977

47 Aldo Tambellini, *Picturephone Chicago Sonia Sheridan*, June 8, 1977 ● 2-channel video, digitized, b/w, sound, 36:32 min. ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

Leonardo / Slow Scan

In a large empty space the performer lies on the floor. She is wearing a U.S. Army issue parachute jumpsuit. Her two arms are outstretched and two small video cameras are strapped to her wrists. The cables from the cameras feed into three monitors. A surveillance camera suspended from the ceiling above the performer projects the performer's image through a video projector onto a suspended large screen. The audience sits on the floor around the circular lit area around the performer. There are three 16mm movie projectors with footage of television images from the 1960s: riots, flight to the moon; civil rights demonstrations; anti-Vietnam War rallies. There is an audio tape recorder with sounds from a Vietnam War documentary; Apollo 8's Mission to the Moon with the conversation among the astronauts and Mission Control and other electronic sounds. There is also a live musician with drums.

I walk to the lit area and with a chalk draw a wide circle around the performer. The image of Leonardo's drawing of the outstretched male figure within a circle becomes apparent in the projection on the screen. Slowly the performer, Sarah Dickenson, begins to create movement. The two cameras that she has on her wrists capture random images of the audience and project them onto the monitors. As the performer stands up, she starts to point the cameras at individuals in the audience. People begin to see their images projected onto the monitors and become aware that they are the focus of the surveillance. As the action flows, one by one the movies begin to be projected on the wall. At this point, you have simultaneous surveillance of the audience and surveillance of the surveillant. The recorded audio begins and, at one point, the drummer joins in, improvising. The program abruptly stops.

Moonblack Performance (Homage to Leonardo), Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. ● Aldo Tambellini, description of *Moonblack,* performance notebook, 1981

48 Aldo Tambellini, *Leonardo / Slow Scan*, 1981 ● Video, digitized, b/w, sound, 1:01:33 min ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA

Electromedia

My films began to be used in many ways – not only shown in the movie theater as a traditional projected film but also, as part of my Electro-

media performances, de-materializing the space where it was projected and producing a dislocation of the senses of the viewer. I consider my films to be an experience. Sometimes, the films were used as an environment projected on a given space and sometimes, films and the zooming of the animated slides became one. At times, the films were projected on bodies of performers and objects such as inflatable screens, black weather balloons, and at other times, the films were projected on split screens or in simultaneous multiple screen projections.

<div align="right">Aldo Tambellini, n.d.</div>

Retracing Black

With *Retracing Black* Aldo Tambellini goes back to the roots of New York's darkest underground scene, creating a multimedia installation that originates from his experiences with the pictorial manipulation of the image and results in a reflection on the transition from video to experimental performance. In this work, the abstract expressionism and sculptural materiality explored by the artist – first on canvas, then on film – merge into a synaesthetic triptych, which portrays the internal collapse of the dogmas and icons of the American consumer society. The use of television footage, along with fragments filmed in the poor, working-class areas of Brooklyn and Manhattan before urban renewal and moral readjustment, transcends the actual social context to show not only the inner transformation of a city, but also the destruction of an already shattered political, social, and economic system. The hand-painted films, belonging to the famous *Black Film Series*, are featured along with some unreleased works filmed by the artist in 1960s New York. The cinematic and electronic compositions are intertwined with the hard-hitting, sociopolitical poetry of Calvin C. Hernton, one of the members of the UMBRA Group.

While in his films Tambellini chose *Black* as the only possible option, combining futurist dynamism with embryonic forms, primal geometries, and space exploration, his insight into the contemporary world focuses on the juxtaposition of the private dimension of everyday life and the public dimension of television, which results in a dramatic political interplay between the uniqueness of man and his representation within a given social community. The television image thus becomes the focus and pretext for looking beyond one's self and getting lost in the expressive dimension of the electronic device that generates that image. Returning to the traditional canons of Expanded Cinema and multimedia environments, *Retracing Black* reflects on the sensory mutation of the cinematic and videographic elements, subverting found footage and TV-collage practices to provide the figurative element with an absolute, clear identity. Once again, the chosen form of visual representation is shrouded in black to convey a sense of incorporeal materiality. Once again, the elements change and the body of the image dematerializes in the depth of the abstract form.

<div align="right">Pia Bolognesi and Giulio Bursi</div>

Study of Internal Shapes and Outward Manifestations

In *Study of Internal Shapes and Outward Manifestations*, created for the Italian Pavilion of the 56th Venice Biennale, Tambellini crystallizes in syncretic form the transdisciplinary pathway that has characterized his unique career in the evolution of Experimental and Expanded Cinema. Starting with new research on the relationship between archive material, pictorial sign, and transformation of the devices linked with the moving image, the artist developed a multi-screen installation in dialogue with the historical artistic references that influenced his production, from his studies as a sculptor under Ivan Meštroviś at Syracuse University, to his experience at the Center for Advanced Visual Studies (CAVS) at MIT with the founder of Zero Group, Otto Piene (1978–1984). His interest in projection devices and film media (film and slides) began when he moved to New York in 1959, and grew in parallel with his work in the plastic arts (*Black*, 1959–1961 and *The Seed*, 1962–1963). Attracted above all by the energetic nature of painting, and influenced by the monumental canvases of Franz Kline, Tambellini transferred first onto slides, and later onto cinematic frames, a meticulous expression of the power of gesture, creating over the course of ten years a portfolio that explores the potential of manipulating film and photography using different techniques applied directly to the medium.

Film is the main object of this exchange, drawing on diverse elements that mix his classical artistic training with the influences of kinetic sculpture, camera-less film, hypnotic cinema, and direct animation. Historically, this transition came about in conjunction with the birth of New American Cinema and is part of the development from art films to the immersive environments of Expanded Cinema. Nevertheless, before film, before environments and his multimedia performances (*Electromedia Performances*, 1965–1969), Tambellini identified the projected painting of slides as the physical connection between the iconographic research of abstract geometrism and the study of the inner form. This typology of prepared slides,

K   Aldo Tambellini, *Study of Internal Shapes and Outward Manifestations*, 2015
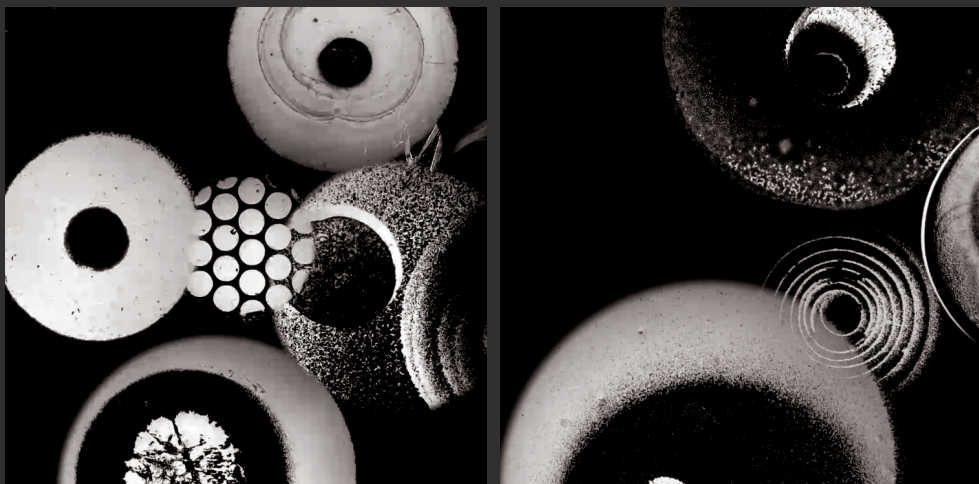
defined by the artist as "Lumagrams," brings together the idea of "drawing" and "luminance," fine-tuning the relationship between light and material stratification in order to create a personal expression of painting with luminous intensity. Defining the essential qualities of this kind of employment of film and glass takes on a very precise meaning in the artist's work, from which the most organically structured components of his work were later to develop, from multiple projection to the cathodic element. From an output in excess of a thousand pieces, developed around a dozen or so iconographic nuclei, *Study of Internal Shapes and Outward Manifestations* presents the two series *Internal* and *Animated* (1965–1969), where for the first time forms follow one other, inspired by the inside of the human body, in an abstraction that Tambellini defined as an intimate connection between organ, material, trace and movement. The sequence of Lumagrams, multiplied in a device that accentuates their spatial depth, animates the reaction between medium and light, between public and space, through the new high-definition digital projection that strengthens its visual intensity. His research on human anatomy and fossil biology inspired by Leonardo – to whom Tambellini returns both in his films of the sixties and in his performances of the seventies – together with the evolution of living forms immortalized by the scientific microphotography of Roman Vishniac, becomes active in projection with the hand-painted films of the *Black Film Series* (1965–1969), on the basis of an expansion and contraction that passes from painting to frame, coming out in projection in an anomalous form, amplified by the succession of screens and the soundtrack, made by reworking magnetic tape and recordings from the artist's archive.

  The relationship formed between the persistence of Lumagram images and the impermanence of the animated sign of the film causes the dissolution of the compositional principles that Tambellini experimented with in painting, leaving room for a visual sequence suitable for formal and technical repetition – the choice of the circle as matrix for the figurative element, and black as the main colour. The research that began with underground sculpture and huge canvases finds in hand-painted film the crystallization of the circular figure, "archetype and model that preexists and remains constant in all possible morphisms" (Giuseppe Di Napoli, 2011). Only with projection does this form symbol become the interface between idea and moving matter, in a perceptual system that is different to the immersive structures of the 1960s Intermedia environments, and more of a self-determining apparatus in which the artist decontextualizes the perceptual interaction of sound and image, deliberately preserved by the tradition of the happening. In this way *Study of Internal Shapes and Outward Manifestations*, by retracing the artist's stylistic evolution, gives us the summary, as organic as possible, of a procedure that retains and relaunches the synaesthesia between the elements of the same history.   **Pia Bolognesi and Giulio Bursi**
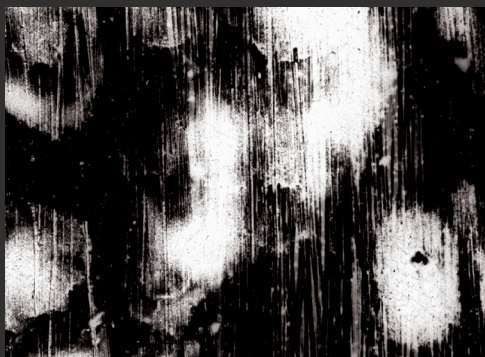
Black Matters

At the beginning of the 1970s, after a ten-year explosion of creativity and experimentation, Aldo Tambellini moved his studio and his activities from the Lower East Side of Manhattan to Brooklyn. In this new urban and social environment, he decided to provide a new narrative about the city and its neighborhood – such as the photographic and video documentation *Atlantic in Brooklyn* in 1971. In this same period, the artist participated in a series of public school programs that promoted the teaching of video techniques to children living in economically deprived neighborhoods around the city. From January to June 1971 in particular, Tambellini put together for a group of students from LaGuardia School, Harlem a program designed, as he said, "to expand the senses and the sensibilities of the participating students". The program was called "Creative Electrogaphy." The idea was to initiate a new approach to instruction, one where the students would not "sit" in front of a television and become its consumers; rather, they would create a series of independent analytical videotapes which dealt with the environment they interacted with on a daily basis and the social and economic aspects and issues of their neighborhoods. These videos would be created by students for students.

In 1971, the Division of the Humanities and the Arts of the New York State Board of Education in Albany, NY, commissioned the electrographer-artist-teacher Aldo Tambellini to create a multimedia event. This would include a film and a series of color slides which would show the different programs in the arts available to children in New York State. Tambellini completed several hours of filming in early 1972 and joined his friend, the filmmaker Mike Kuchar, in the editing process. The result was a 30-minute documentary, *Sights and Sounds of Youth*, a work which was the last time Tambellini picked up a film camera, and the only documentary shot by the filmmaker in his entire career. For forty-five years the artist kept in his archive the unedited sequences of this material as a documentation of that experience, waiting for the moment when he could complete the cycle by presenting it, with other elements, as part of a new work. Unable to find the original slides which accompanied the project, Tambellini decided to work over the original footage of the film into "six movements" using a remounting of edited and unedited materials accompanied by a series of "lumagrams," painting on glass slides made by the artist for his most famous electromedia performance called *Black Zero* and originally conceived to be projected on multidimensional elements such as inflatables and weather balloons.

In a continuous play of layers of music, sounds, and words of the artist from his past and his present, reality interrupts the visual composition in a violent and abrupt manner. The soundtrack created forces the viewer to face the reality of today's precarious political climate in the USA. The chants from the Black Lives Matter movement, the immigration deportation protests, and the demonstrations against the Muslim ban were recorded during recent demonstrations. Recited excerpts of Tambellini's most political poetry reinforce the political aspect of the piece. References to black as a spatial concept also found in the soundtrack are performed by Askia Touré, a long-time friend of Tambellini and a member of the original UMBRA Group and Neiel Simpson, spoken word artist and award-winning

L   Aldo Tambellini, *Black Matters*, 2017

L   Aldo Tambellini, *Black Matters*, 2017

poet. These two aspects of Tambellini's work from the 1970s, the *Sights and sounds of Youth* and *Creative Electrogaphy* are joined in an unlikely relationship within the installation *Black Matters*. They both pay homage to the interaction of children and art, which is a favorite theme that can be found throughout the work of Aldo Tambellini. From his first photographic work at the age of 16, capturing images of the children in his neighborhood in Syracuse, NY, in the early 1950s to the film *Black Plus X* (part of the *Black Film Series* 1965–1969) and his video works, *Black and Minus 1*, over the years Tambellini has continued to work on themes connected with children within the urban African-American community and the sociopolitical context of America. In *Black Matters* Tambellini uses his old creative works remembering old applications, reinforcing new ideas, and applying a new creative force to create a memorable experience where the viewer sees sights, motion, and sounds converge into one organic whole.   **Pia Bolognesi and Giulio Bursi, 2017**

52   Aldo Tambellini, *Black Matters*, 2017 ● HD-multi-channel installation, b/w, sound, 9 min. ● Conceived by Aldo Tambellini with Pia Bolognesi and Giulio Bursi ● Edited by Giuseppe Boccassini ● Sound by Aldo Tambellini, Askia Touré, Neiel Simpson, Michael Woods, Eric Zinman ● Produced by ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe in collaboration with Atelier Impopulaire, Milan ● Courtesy Aldo Tambellini Archive; The Aldo Tambellini Art Foundation, Salem, MA & ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe

Aldo Tambellini

Black MATTERS

Curated by Pia Bolognesi and Giulio Bursi
in collaboration with the ZKM | Karlsruhe

Initiated by Peter Weibel

11 March – 6 August 2017
ZKM_Atrium 1+2, ground floor

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