

Rooney, Kara. L. "Aldo Tambellini: We Are the Primitives of a New Era," *The Brooklyn Rail*, October 2013.

## ALDO TAMBELLINI *We Are the Primitives of a New Era*

JAMES COHAN GALLERY | SEPTEMBER 12 – OCTOBER 19, 2013

BY KARA L. ROONEY

Aldo Tambellini is obsessed with black. This fixation extends back six decades to a time when the artist, as one of new media's avant-garde pioneers, was exploring the color and its associated meanings in various iterations of swirling spirals, black holes, and spherical matrices. At times these early experiments took the form of camera-less films the artist titled "lumagrams"—hand-scored and -painted glass slides projected directly onto the wall. At others, Tambellini's paintings, works on paper (both graphic and photographic), and many experimentally produced videos functioned as discrete components of his grander 1960s *Electromedia* performances, multi-disciplinary theatrical experiences aimed at the "dislocation of the senses."

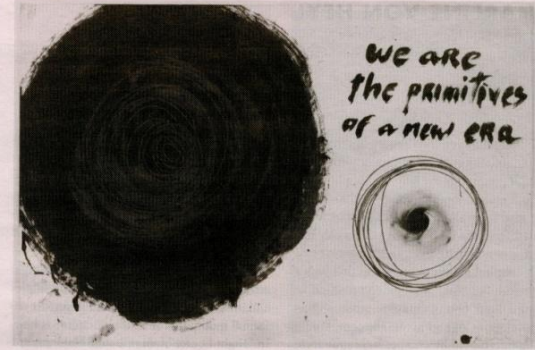
At James Cohan Gallery, guest curator Joseph Ketner II has staged a refreshing look at these earlier works, including a series of innovative photographic prints known as "videograms," alongside a new multimedia installation, which combines selected "lumagrams," clips from Tambellini's famed *Black Film* series, an audio score, and projected poetry. Ketner, an art historian and longtime collector of Tambellini's work, offers viewers an opportunity to experience these groundbreaking contributions anew, shown here in the size and scale originally intended but until now, relegated to the annals of obsolete technology and outmoded film archives.

A series of paintings from the early 1960s constitute the earliest works in the show, as well as present the theoretical basis for Tambellini's fascination. "We are the primitives of a new era," the artist proclaims in a Duco, acrylic, and graphite drawing from his 1961 *Manifesto* series. Two spherical orbs, one white and one

black, populate the surface of the sheet, each with concentric spiral rings occupying a central nucleus. Rough-hewn and gesturally physical, the imagery eerily foreshadows the first Apollo moon landing in 1969. According to the artist, this lunar event signaled the birth of the new era he references—one in which our perspective was permanently altered. Space exploration, specifically the scientific discoveries tied to the black hole's unbounded temporality, and coupled with the decade's series of mathematical breakthroughs regarding the time/space continuum, fundamentally changed our worldview. We could no longer ignore the fact that we were part of something much larger, something we were only just beginning to understand. Science challenged the myopia of our thinking and a new freedom occurred, both in art and in culture.

Tambellini's artistic response was born out of these events just as much as it was from his experiences as a boy in World War II-era Italy. This postwar sensibility, the devastation and senseless loss of life witnessed under the fascist rule of Mussolini, fueled the artist's commitment to a positivist outlook. Technology, he mused, was the "medium of the future." But Tambellini was not satisfied simply to utilize his generation's technological trends; rather, he employed these emerging technologies, particularly those associated with television broadcasting and digital video, as subterfuge for his multifaceted artistic experiments.

A suite of 12 of the artist's "videograms" (1968–69)—camera-less photographic prints made by placing photo-sensitive paper in direct contact with the electromagnetic rays produced on the surface of a television screen—captures this pioneering approach to technological



Aldo Tambellini, "We Are the Primitives of a New Era, from the Manifesto Series," 1961. Duco, acrylic, and pencil on paper. 25 x 30". Photographer: Christopher Burke. © The Artist / Courtesy James Cohan Gallery, New York/Shanghai.

innovation. Abstract spectral forms populate the compositions, the television's cathode rays "burning" the paper in various shades of inky black and torqued ellipses. Not exhibited since their creation in the 1960s, these unique prints offer a meditative respite from the cacophonous onslaught of popular television imagery, to which we are all too accustomed in the contemporary moment.

"Black Spiral (Split Screen)" (1969/2013) transmutes this idea into moving form. In 1969, Tambellini worked with a team of engineers to rebuild a television's interior cathode ray, programming it to spray in spiral form rather than in the horizontal bands used for traditional broadcast purposes. The result was a man-made electromagnetic vortex, hypnotizing in its mirrored visual register. (The original 16 mm film was created using these broadcast television signals and, just this year, was transferred to Blu-ray.) The restored film at James Cohan is accompanied by an original score, which combines audio clips from the 1969 Apollo II lift-off, archival recordings of artists'

meetings, space sounds, and electronic noise. The film "Black Space Triptych" (1965/2013) and Tambellini's "Lumagrams" (1963–8/2013) round out his immersive installation.

Black and white: for Tambellini, these polarities continue to mark our territory as sentient beings. "Black is the beginning. It is birth, the oneness of all, the expansion of consciousness in all directions. Light is energy, and the same energy which moves through us is the energy which moves through the universe." Sixty years later, the artist still woos us with his powerfully affecting prose—harnessing the spirited energy of the era, while allowing his monochromatic imagery the physical distance necessary to absorb the vibrations of its aftershocks. ☺

Aldo Tambellini's *Black Film Series* will be screened on October 18 as part of the MoMA's 11th International Festival of Film Preservation.

533 West 26th Street // NY, NY 10001

