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## We are the Primitives of a New Era. An interview with Aldo Tambellini (Part III)



(to read Part I of this interview go to [this link](#))

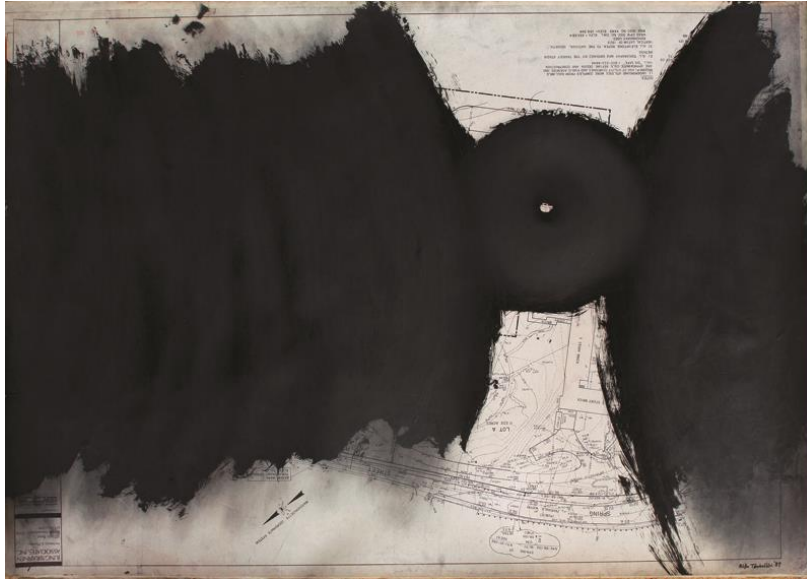
By Ernesto Menéndez-Conde

Ernesto Menéndez-Conde: You did some of your paintings over architectural surveys, how does that relate to your work?

Aldo Tambellini: When I was in Cambridge, at MIT, the Center for Advanced Visual Studies sent me to Brazil because some of my work was in the Sao Paolo Biennale in 1983. My father was born in Brazil and so I was interested in Brazilian culture. My mind was kind of removed from United States, and when I came back I found, near where I was living, a lot of architectural print papers that had been thrown away. I selected certain sheets which had graphic lines and symbols on them and I laid them on the floor of my apartment and painted, as I always do, as traditional Chinese or Japanese artists would do: the paper on the floor, I on my knees, using black acrylic paint, wax, and powder graphite and no white. I used to paint with my knees right on the floor, because I didn't want the paint to drip because this became a cliché of the Abstract Expressionism and I don't particularly like to do clichés of other people.

# JAMES COHAN GALLERY

Responding intuitively with quick automatic gestures, being aware of the printed symbols and other signs existing on the paper and integrating these into the process allowing no change. I always created abstractions dealing with tension and suspension. I started to attack some of the paper perforating and altering the surface as an act of destruction.



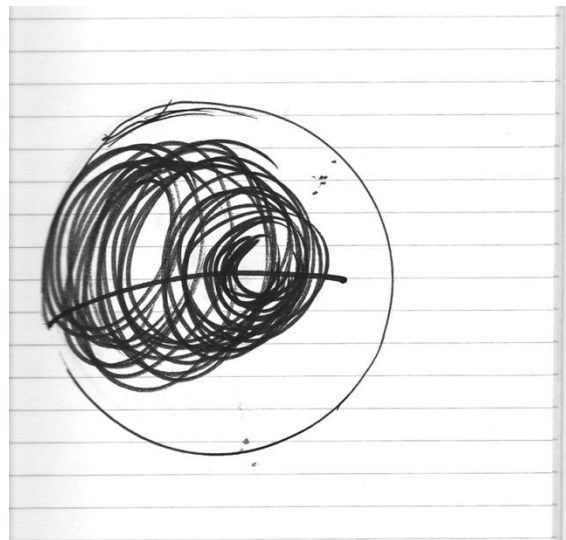
ALDO TAMBELLINI

*L-1, Black Energy Series Suspended, 32X42 in. acrylic and graphite on architectural paper, 1989*

Courtesy: Aldo Tambellini

EM: Do you work with sketches?

AT: No. I have sketches but my process is not what's in the notebooks, necessarily. For instance, four or five years ago, I took school notebooks, you know, the lined paper ones and I began to do drawings of lines, things for future ideas, but I don't do sketches before I do something. I begin to work and my intuition tells me what is the next thing, and the next thing, and then I stop at some point. I stop when I have finished saying what I had to say.



ALDO TAMBELLINI

Notebook spiral in handdrawn circle,  
2010

Courtesy: Aldo Tambellini

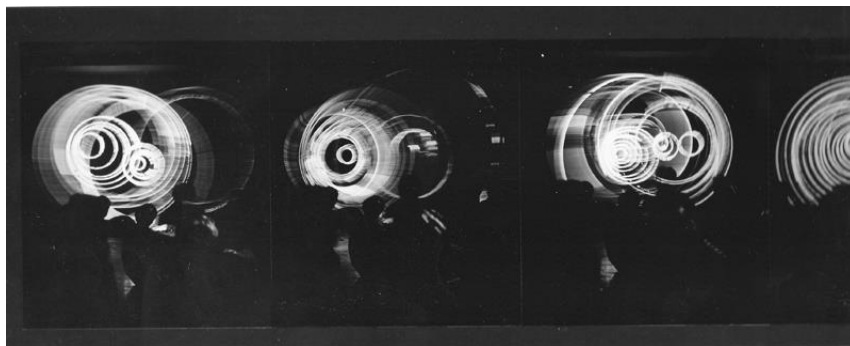
# JAMES COHAN GALLERY

EM: You also write poetry?

AT: Oh, yes. I have written over 2000 poems. When I went to school in Italy, it was a traditional classic kind of schooling. We used to have Italian literature. We read Dante's *Inferno*, we memorized part of it, and we had classic Italian writers. I thought to myself that I could never write in this kind of way. I was not aware at all of the modern writers in Italy. The director of the school was very conservative, so we didn't know anything about modern art, although Marinetti, the Futurist poet, was the Minister of Culture under Mussolini. In the traditional books of literature you would have some artwork by Boccioni, Balla and De Chirico and a sculptor, before the Futurists, Medardo Rosso. When I came over to this country on an American Liberty ship, I met a poet. He was four or five years older than me. His name was Giovanni Cappelli, and he belonged to the group of a famous Italian writer, who I didn't know, the poet Ungaretti. Gianni Cappelli introduced me to modern poetry, and he's the one who encouraged me to write poetry. My first poems, when I went to Syracuse, were in Italian. Then I started writing in English and every so often, I'd start writing poetry. At Syracuse University, I submitted some of my poems to the college magazine and they published one of them, called *Vertical*, which made me excited. That was the beginning of my poetry writing.

EM: How would you relate your poetry to your work?

AT: In the last five years or so, I've begun to write poetry about the universe and space. Through the computer, I work with Anna- she is very good at computers- we have self-published different books; one called *Black on Black*. In this book I asked two of my friends to read the poetry and record a CD which then became a short poetry film called *Black on Black*. We also made a videotape, actually a film- Anna, I, and another friend of mine- called *Listen*, dedicated to the Futurist Russian poet Mayakovsky. It's an 18-minute long anti-war video where you hear me reading my poetry, and see video clips of me reading as well as footage from the media dealing with the invasion of Iraq. It's a very experimental film. Poetry became a strong creative activity of mine and I plan to use more poetry in the future. The installation in this exhibit at the James Cohan Gallery has pieces of my space poetry projected onto the floor some of them animated into circles.



ALDO TAMBELLINI and OTTO PIENE

*Blackout*, 1967

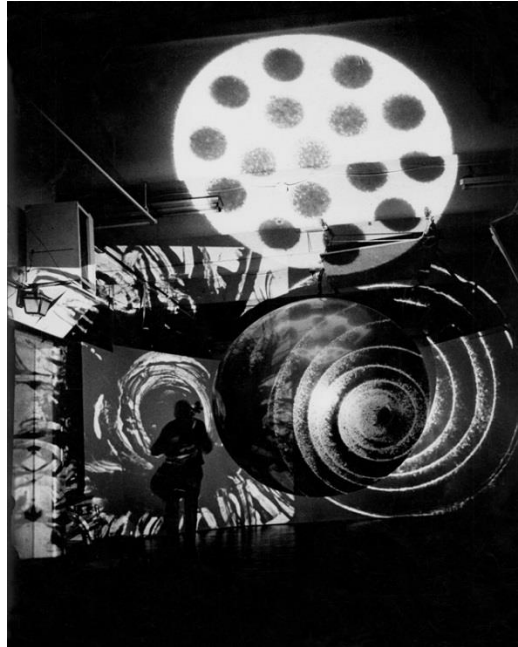
Performance with projections held at

Black Gate Theater

Courtesy: Aldo Tambellini

## JAMES COHAN GALLERY

When I started doing the performances, way back in the 60's, what was popular in New York was called Happenings. Happenings were done by artists like Oldenburg and Jim Dine but that type of performance was more involved with theater. In my performances, I was using poetry, hand-painted slide projections, film and later videos and kinds of elements, which were all electrical, so I call my work, *Electromedia*. Everything had to do with electricity, so it was differentiated from the Happenings, which were involved with theater. I was trying to integrate the different arts. My idea was to create a synthesis of all these media together, to create a new art form.



ALDO TAMBELLINI

*Black Zero*, 1968 Calo Scott amplified cello lumagrams slides and film

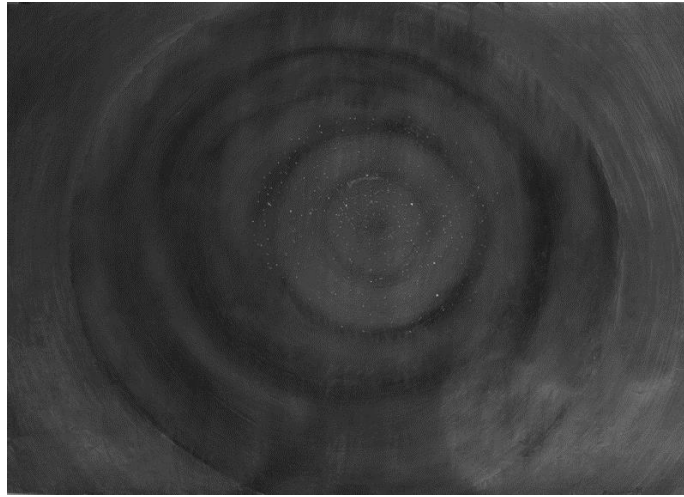
EM: When did you leave New York? Did it affect your work?

AT: In 1976, when I became a fellow in MIT/CAVS. MIT is a very scientific environment. I became more interested in communications. It probably affected my work because I was in a scientific environment but not in an artistic environment.

When I moved out of the Lower East Side, I moved to Brooklyn, in an area which was inexpensive. If you are familiar with Brooklyn, there is a clock tower downtown, a big clock. I lived across the street. I was using my black and white porta-pack, and I began to record the life of the street, Atlantic Avenue. At that time it was not a middle class, artistic area, as it is today. They had prostitutes in the next block, and a bar, and I began to record, and to spend a lot of time capturing the activity on the street. There was one guy, a veteran; I used to talk to him sometimes. He used to sleep sometimes on the sidewalk. I recorded many hours and I did all the editing in-camera. Every time I did the edit there was a break which would show up on the video. There was a show of my photography and video and they had four TV monitors and played this

## JAMES COHAN GALLERY

video, called *Atlantic in Brooklyn* on four channels. They put them all together and they were premièred at the Kitchen in New York and later for a month at the Everson Museum in Syracuse, New York. It was like recording an area which has had so many changes.



ALDO TAMBELLINI  
*2-B Black Energy Series Suspended*, 32X42 in. acrylic and graphite on architectural paper, 1989  
Courtesy: Aldo Tambellini

EM: It seems to me your work had very little to do with what was trendy in the 60's. Did you feel like an outsider?

AT: Yes, absolutely. I was the opposition of what was trendy and commercial, intentionally, and that caused me a lot problems. I was eliminated as an artist. Every time they put me outside, I came out with a new expression of my art. I was totally aware of what was going on.

The first television program done in a professional TV studio WDR, *Black Gate Cologne* was done by Otto Piene and me in Cologne, Germany, in 1968. But nobody puts it down in a book on the history of video art except in Europe. I did have a section in the *Medium is the Medium*, done at WBGH, Boston, MA. I was in the first museum show of video art, *Vision and Television* that at the Brandeis University. They eliminated that too from the history.

Scholars should write about history. People should write the true history, and not alter it. That's exactly what they do in books, propaganda. They put certain people and they eliminate others. That's incorrect. As long as I am alive, I will try to make it correct. The same with the history in the Lower East Side. My multimedia shows included *The Black Poets*; I was pioneering in integrating the Arts. There is one book called *The New Bohemians*, which documents the beginning of that history. But they eliminated all those guys, so now they begin the history of the Lower East Side with the graffiti era, when they had a lot of downtown galleries. No, it started before that, and we were the pioneers. One of the UMBRA poets was here last night. We are trying to see if we can correct the wrong because if you destroy the true history and rewrite a different one you are committing a cultural crime. You are making money off the blood of other people and I am against that very strongly. Someone has to correct the history. They gave me credit in London in 2012; they said I was a pioneer.