

Sat 11.03.2017–Sun 06.08.2017

Aldo Tambellini. Black Matters

ZKM_Lichthof 1+2

Press conference on Thursday 09.03.2017 at 11.00

With *Black Matters*, the ZKM | Karlsruhe is presenting a full solo exhibition of American artist Aldo Tambellini for the first time. Tambellini is one of the pioneers of intermedia art of the 1960s and 1970s. After some of Tambellini's works were seen lastly in exhibitions and screenings at the Centre Pompidou in Paris (2012), the Tate Modern in London (2012), the MoMA in New York (2013) and the 56th Biennale di Venezia (2015), the exhibition project, initiated by Peter Weibel and curated by Pia Bolognesi and Giulio Bursi in cooperation with the ZKM, is now providing a complete overview of the multimedia practice of the artist for the first time. *Black Matters* takes a journey through the most productive and most energetically charged periods of Aldo Tambellini's work and shows films, videos, installations, lumagrams (hand-painted slides) and videograms made between 1960 and 1980 together with his early paintings. The ZKM | Laboratory for Antiquated Video Systems has restored and digitalised a total of about 120 – some not yet published – videos for the retrospective. The artist himself has collaborated intensively on the conceptual design of the exhibition. In a multimedia installation created for the exhibition, Tambellini's central artistic, political and philosophical undertakings can be seen: *Black Matters*.

The motto of Tambellini's lifework *Black Matters* – the examination of the significance of black in all dimensions, from black holes to skin colour – achieved immense topicality during the historical moment at which racial tensions once again increased in the USA and the international movement *Black Lives Matter*, which protested against violence towards African Americans, was thus created in 2013.

For Aldo Tambellini (born 1930 in Syracuse, NY, USA, lives and works in Cambridge, MA, USA) black has always played a major role – "Black Mattered". After his early experiments with colour in the late 1950s, Tambellini recognised black as an artistic, philosophical and socio-political obligation, which led him intuitively to creating works of art solely with the aid of black.

Influenced by the fight for racial equality, the Vietnam War and the era of space exploration, Tambellini created a convincing oeuvre, which can be considered today as a rare example of the fragile equilibrium

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between the integration of contemporary technological stimuli and their contradictions to the social and political environment.

Visionary of the New York underground scene

Tambellini is well-known as a key figure in the New York underground scene of the 1960s. As a mentor, visionary, agitator and catalyst of innovation in the language of expanded arts, he combined the transformational properties of artistic expression, which come from the legacy of abstract expressionism, with the earliest experiences of multimedia arts.

While he was actively involved in cultural production as a member of the new communal studio and the movements of the counterculture in New York, he completed his academic education with a degree under sculptor Ivan Meštrović at the University of Notre Dame and moved to the Lower East Side in New York in 1959. Here, he founded *Group Center*, a multifaceted underground art movement, which united poets, sculptors, painters, musicians and performers with the philosophy of bypassing the art market with art and bringing it directly to the public. Existing as a group between 1966 and 1967, *Black Mask* was created from *Group Center*, which put on several multimedia events such as *Black Zero* (1965). This group pre-empted the strategies of *Occupy Wall Street* (2011) with its protest performances in front of the MoMa (1966) and along New York's Wall Street (February 1967). The different movements, in which Aldo Tambellini participated, were therefore both artistically and politically avant-garde. The aim of this exhibition is to recollect this critical, subversive and revolutionary New York of the 1960s, at a point when the USA is in a restorative phase.

Performances as part of the civil rights movement

From his studio, Tambellini actively participated in the politics for the redefinition of black identity, supported by a committed civil rights movement and influenced by the *Umbra Writer's Workshop*, the first major organisation of black authors after the 1960s. Tambellini included *Umbra* poets such as Ishmael Reed and Calvin Hernton in his early performances, during which he exhibited his first examples of "projected paintings" (lumagrams; hand-painted slides) and, as he later named it, invented his *Electromedia Performances*.

Attracted by the energetic nature of painting, Tambellini initially painstakingly communicated an expression of energy through gestures and blackness onto slides, and later onto film frames and video. In the course of the 1960s, he created the *Black Project*, from which emerged the *Black Film Series* (16 mm films), the *Black Performances* (*Electromedia Performances*) and finally the *Black Video Series* (1966–1968), with which he began to experiment with video technology.

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Black Gate Theater

In 1967, he founded the *Black Gate Theater* with his friend and colleague Otto Piene, a room, in which artists brought new experimental projects to life. In the year that followed, he developed the first program on the WDR which was designed by artists for national television: *Black Gate Cologne*. In 1969, together with other artists, he presented *BLACK* in the collaborative project *The Medium Is the Medium* on WGBH, a television station in Boston. As a protagonist of the most important video art exhibitions such as *TV as a Creative Medium*, *Light as Art*, *E.A.T.*, *der documenta 6* and *Some More Beginnings*, Tambellini developed a way of working, which combined experimentation with forms and political activism through his practice and educational programmes in primary schools and academies (*Sight & Sound of Youth*, *Creative Electrography*).

New artistic forms of expression

After his experiences in New York, Tambellini was a member of the *Center for Advanced Visual Studies* (CAVS) at the MIT under the guidance of Otto Piene between 1978 and 1984. At the MIT, he continued his research into the technological aspects of TV transmission and formed a team with like-minded artists, students and technicians, which he called *Communicationsphere*. In this technology-savvy context, Tambellini expanded his own interest and his knowledge of new technology and began a unique examination of the video sphere: He looked at space and electromagnetic ENERGY, in order to develop expanded forms of communication and new artistic forms of expression.

After a period of absence in the 1990s, in which he concentrated on writing and publishing his poetry and searching and collecting his early work, he created new multimedia work in 2010, which reconfirmed the artist to his early followers, presenting him at the same time to a new generation, who now recognised him as one of the pioneers of intermedia arts or as one of the fathers of *Expanded Cinema*.

The work complex, which is being exhibited in the ZKM in the first major solo exhibition of the artist, can be understood as a manifest for an organic connection between painting, sculpture, photography, moving picture installations, kinetic art and performance. Tambellini's artistic vision comprises all implications of contemporary media and recognises its potential as linguistic, artistic and social tools. The aim of the exhibition is to present Tambellini's early works from the 1950s together with as yet unpublished work from his New York period and films and videos, which mark the success of the artist in the 1960s and 1970s.

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The ZKM | Karlsruhe thanks Anna Salamone, the partner of the artist, without whom this exhibition could not have been realised. The exhibition has been developed with the support of the Harvard Film Archive.

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