

# Rebellion in Art Form— Tambellini's 'Black 2'

By Don Ross

Of The Herald Tribune Staff

Aldo Tambellini has survived, thanks to his toughness, his belief in himself and in his vision of life, and to his wife, Elsa, who works as a waitress in a Third Ave. restaurant.

Tambellini is an artist and a rebel. Only a few people glimpse what he is getting at. Elsa may not be sure herself. No Tambellini hangs in any museum. (Tambellini has picketed several New York museums in protest against this omission.) Four people, including two gallery owners, a dentist and a producer of TV commercials, have bought a painting or a drawing or two from him in the last four years, but this isn't enough to support him.

On and off he has taught art in New York. The latest such stint was for Pratt Institute, where he filled in for a term as an instructor in sculpture. Without Elsa, Tambellini would have had to go to work, maybe as a short-order cook, and then he would have had little time for his rebellion and his search for new dimly seen art forms. It might not have made the world any poorer. And then again, it just might have.

He has an A. B. in fine arts from Syracuse University, an M. A. in fine arts from the University of Notre Dame, and he studied art and architecture for a year at the University of Oregon.

## NOT A CENT

"All that," he said the other day in the bare loft that he and Elsa occupy at 414 West Broadway, "and I haven't a cent in my pocket. But don't write that," he said hastily. "Nobody likes a poor man in the U. S. In this country everybody hates a poor man. They want every man to be an image of success and affluence. This is one of the sicknesses of this society."

Tambellini is not only a rebel but a leader of rebels. Last Monday, as producer and

director, he put on a hour-and-20-minute show called "Black 2" at the Bridge Theater, 4 St. Mark's Place. The performance, which Tambellini describes as sound, light and motion brought into an organic form and the fusion of abstract and social commitments, will be shown twice more—at midnight Friday and at 8:30 p. m. a week from tomorrow.

Among those associated with Tambellini in this enterprise are Lorraine Boyd, a dancer; Cecil McBee, who thumps a bass, and Calvin C. Hernton, a poet who reads his own poems of racial conflict with a flashlight. Elsa is the co-ordinator, script girl and troubleshooter.

"One of Elsa's jobs is to keep the artists from having fights," Tambellini said. "Artists are very hard to get along with. I am very hard to get along with."

## REVELATIONS

For "Black 2" Tambellini has made what he calls luma-grams. They are paintings on 35 mm. glass slide mounts. He projects 200 of them on a curtain at the front of a theater during the performance, sometimes while Miss Boyd, dressed in black tights, is dancing in a way that seems to represent the plight of the Negro, and while Mr. McBee is thumping and bowing his bass beautifully.

Some of the luma-grams are reminiscent of slides of diseased tissue. (During the show a spectator whispered, "Clearly, a bad case of amoebic dysentery.") Tambellini said he is interested in evolving art forms from the revelations of the microscope. He is also interested in the revelations of telescopes in the cosmos, and some of the luma-grams are reminiscent of a derelict space. Others, have a kind of fetal, pincental look.

Tambellini talks about the dislocations of the world and about art fluently. He talks rapidly of the American dis-

eases. (President Johnson, he says, has fascist leanings.) But about his own art he is apt to be inarticulate.

"I work from intuition," he said, "and not from intellectualization."

Much of "Black 2" consists of noises like a buzz saw gone berserk and a machine gun. At least one sensitive person was observed putting her fingers in her ears. But to counterbalance the stridency, there is beautiful flowing motion and sound in the dancing and music of Miss Boyd and Mr. McBee.

A program note for "Black 2" says: "For the purpose of continually the audience is requested not to applaud during Black 2." Few square up-towners would feel moved to applaud during the show or after.

Tambellini dresses in a black shirt, black pants and blue sneakers. The largest of his paintings (14 by 7 feet) in the loft studio is a double image of a black circle within a larger white circle in a vast black space. Much of his work is black paint slashed violently on white. Black fascinates him. Recently, the double image, or, as he calls it, the echo, has been recurring in his work.

"This two in one thing appeals to me," he said. "It seems to be happening in my work. I have no explanation of why this is."

## ANSWER

Tambellini is 33. An acquaintance (who should have known better) asked him recently why he didn't revert to the representational style he displayed shortly after leaving art school where he studied with the late Ivan Mestrovic. The acquaintance, remembering some of the early Tambellini's, which seemed very saleable, felt that if Tambellini had followed this bent, he could now have a studio in the suburbs and Elsa could quit work and have a couple of kids.

Tambellini's answer: "It

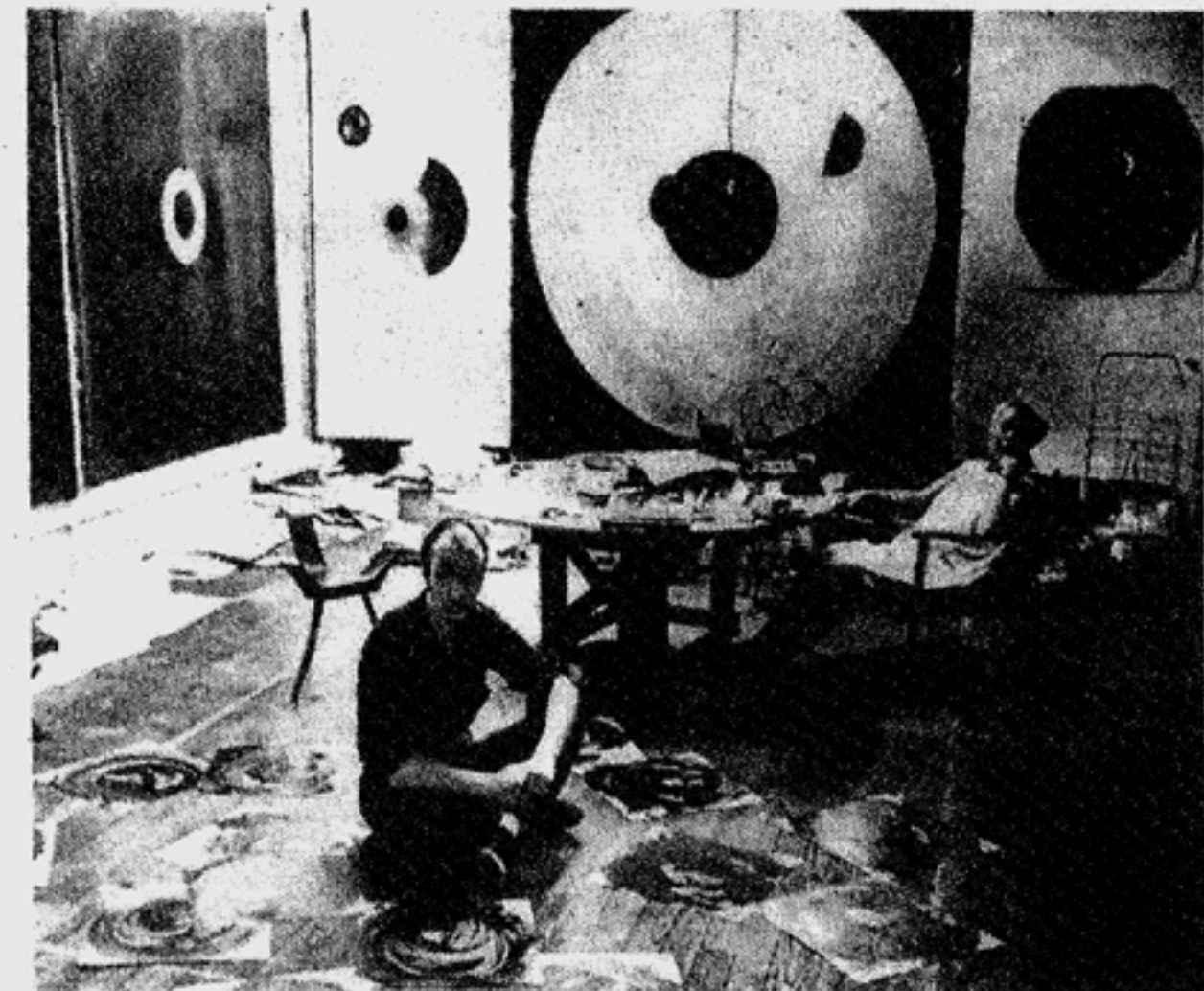
wouldn't be me." Clearly, he felt this was the only explanation necessary.

He is an easy mark for ridicule by those who don't know him. Those who do respect him. They may not know what he is doing, and they may even doubt that he does, but they know that he will not swerve from his path. In a time of opportunism, they find something splendid in this principled obstinacy.

Tambellini is the leader and founder of the Centre, whose other members are Ron Halne and Benn Morris, both painters. Elsa is also a member; she weaves rugs from pieces of ordinary twine. The purpose of the Centre, which was established in 1961, is, Tambellini said, "to have an exchange among the artists—poets, painters, sculptors, jazz musicians, dancers—particularly of the younger generation."

The Centre has put on festivals of the arts in the Lower East Side. In 1963, for example, the group organized a sculpture and drawing show at St. Mark's-in-the-Bowery. Well known artists like Richard Stankiewicz and Philip Pava exhibited as well as the Lower East Side unknowns.

Six months ago the Centre and allied artists had a showing of their works called



Herald Tribune photo by DON RICE

Aldo Tambellini and his wife Elsa in his studio on West Broadway.

"Quantum 1" and "Quantum 2" at the Noah Goldovsky and A. M. Sachs Galleries. The former is on Madison Ave. (Usually, Madison Ave. is an epithet to Tambellini. It stands for commercialism, and there is hardly a drier word in his lexicon.)

"Lights blink on and off, discs rotate, canvases with moving panels alter their shape and color—the meeting of technological concepts with those of art..." said a review of the show in the Herald Tribune.

"There's a lot of serious ac-

tivity going on here in the Lower East Side," said Tambellini. "People should come down here to see these serious things and not just to see crazy people, the homosexuals and transvestites and the others. We believe in freedom of creation, that creation is

serious, and that it is work and not entertainment."

So Aldo Tambellini, the picture of a ludicrous failure in modern American terms, has survived.

"No, I am not discouraged," he said. "I feel better than ever."