

ART

Mr Chow founder back to painting, after 50-year break

By Nick Clark

ARTS CORRESPONDENT

Michael Chow, the celebrated restaurateur, has returned to his “true” passion of making art after what he described as a “50-year sabbatical”.

After a successful career in hospitality, with Mr Chow restaurants in London and across America, he will display work in the capital this week for the first time since he was in his twenties.

“When I was very young, I painted professionally,” Mr Chow said. “Then I quit for a radical sabbatical for 50 years. Now I’m back.”

His work is to be displayed in Pearl Lam Galleries during Art14 London,

the art fair which opens today. The paintings range in price from about £18,000 to £72,000.

The restaurateur returned to painting in 2012, supported by his friend Jeffrey Deitch, former head of the LA Museum of Contemporary Art.

“He saw one of my paintings and he encouraged me to return to it,” the restaurateur said. “I haven’t stopped since.” Writing a catalogue essay for Mr Chow’s work, James Lawrence said it was “good to have him back”.

The abstract expressionist paintings, which measure eight feet by six, are made with household paint, sheets of silver and rubbish.

Mr Chow paints using his Chinese



Michael Chow poses in front of his artworks in a gallery in Hong Kong last month. His work is on at Art 14, London, from today AFP/GETTY

{i} The first Mr Chow restaurant opened in Knightsbridge in London in 1968.

This was followed by locations in Beverly Hills, in 1974, and Midtown New York at 57th Street in 1978. There are now six in total.

name Zhou Yinghua, saying he wanted to return to his cultural heritage, and cites artists including Robert Rauschenberg among his influences.

Mr Chow, son of Peking Opera Grand Master Zhou Xing Fang, was born in Shanghai and went to an English boarding school at 13, where he was given the name Michael Chow. After that, he went to Saint Martins School of Design to study architecture.

He had a few small shows when he was 18. "I got a woodcut into the Museum of Modern Art and showed at the ICA. I had a fairly decent career for a young man," he said.

"But there was too much rejection and no support system. I'm happy Chinese artists are doing well now, but a little jealous of the support system that is there now."

He dropped art and opened the first Mr Chow restaurant in London in 1968 and expanded to the US six years later. The chain now has venues in Los Angeles, New York, Miami and Malibu. Mr Chow said: "I'd never stopped being creative: even my restaurants would become installations and very theatrical. Every night it's a performance; magic must happen."

Through his career in hospitality he made friends with artists including Andy Warhol, David Hockney and Jean-Michel Basquiat, to whom he was "very close, almost a father figure".

"I'm 110 per cent an artist. I do many other things, and can multitask very well," Mr Chow said. "I paid my dues in my restaurant. I now spend so much time on painting and I love it, it's the closest thing to God."