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Baselitz with a self-portrait at the Gagosian Photo: Camera Press/Boaz Teitelbaum

A Baselitz stare: artist's shows open in London

Mark Brown
Arts correspondent

London is having a Georg Baselitz moment, with three exhibitions showing aspects of the German artist's work and passions opening within five weeks.

Baselitz was in London yesterday for an exhibition of new self-portraits at the Gagosian. Last week the British Museum opened a group show of German prints, half by Baselitz, and next month the Royal Academy presents rare chiaroscuro woodcuts from the artist's personal collection and the Albertina in Vienna.

Baselitz, to many, is one of the great living painters. He often displays works upside down, including his London show of new works, which are a tribute to one of his heroes, Willem de Kooning.

The 76-year-old recalled yesterday falling in love with De Kooning's work. "I was a student in 1958 in Berlin and I went to an exhibition of American expressionists ... there was [Jackson] Pollock and De Kooning and I had never seen anything quite like it before. I didn't know that Americans could paint; all I knew that they could do was shoot and distribute chocolate." The series is called Farewell Bill and the blasts of colour echo De Kooning's abstract paintings.

Baselitz has long been appreciated in the UK. "The love between me and London goes back a long way," he said recalling his first show more than 30 years ago at Anthony d'Offay's gallery. "When I arrived, Lucian Freud left. He had an exhibition and it was cut by one week because my exhibition started so Lucian said: 'It's impossible for me, I go!'"

Baselitz is showing no sign of slowing down. "I'm afraid of feeling bored to death," he said.

● Georg Baselitz: Farewell Bill is at the Gagosian gallery WC1 from 13 February