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Let's face it, art can help

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SAVING Faces is a charity for research into the prevention and treatment of oral and facial diseases and injuries.

Launched in June 2000 at the National Portrait Gallery, Saving Faces aims to increase public awareness of oral cancer and other facial diseases and secure much-needed funds for research into all aspects of the disorders affecting the mouth and face.

The project was established in 1999 by Iain Hutchison, a consultant in Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery (OMFS) at St Bartholomew's and the Royal London Hospital.

Hutchison's belief in the power of art to engage and transform resulted in the creation of an artist-in-residence post within his own surgical department.

Through the art project Hutchison hoped to illustrate, in a form that was accessible to the general public, what is possible with modern facial surgery, and

show that people with a facial disability are able to enjoy happy, successful and fulfilled lives.

He also wanted to give an artist the opportunity to paint these unique faces as they progressed through their surgical and emotional journey.

Finally, he felt that sitting for and seeing their portraits might have a cathartic effect, allowing the patients to come to terms more rapidly with their altered appearance.

It is clear that the paintings and sketch which resulted represent more than the sample form and shape of the patients' faces.

Gilbert has succeeded in conveying the intensity and power of the face damaged by trauma and the changing emotions and characters of the patients as they experience one of their life's most dramatic events.

The exhibition takes place at the Glasgow School of Art, Renfield Street, Glasgow until 25 January.