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## The scent of luxury? The Louvre commissions fragrances to match its masterpieces for the first time ever



Buly 1803 Belle Epoque Packaging

**W**orld domination - albeit in an understated, under the radar way - is surely on the cards for the cult beauty emporium, Officine Universelle Buly (also known as Buly 1803). For the first beauty retail collaboration of its kind in its 226-year history, the Louvre chose Buly 1803 to partner with in a project which involved commissioning eight perfumers to select one of the museum's 35,000 artworks and reinterpret it as a scent.

"Of course it was a gift," beams Ramdane Touhami, the brand's 45-year-old maverick co-founder, bounding across the Jardin des Tuilleries in a red velvet jacket and his signature wool beanie despite the 32-degree Paris heat.

Touhami rescued the apothecary brand with his French wife, Victoire de Taillac, repackaging it and relaunching it in 2014. Originally founded in 1803, it was known as a perfume and scented vinegar brand. Its founder, Jean-Vincent Bully, 'the L'Oréal of his generation', devised scientifically-advanced products which earned widespread acclaim across Europe.

Touhami reveals – a touch proudly – that for this landmark collaboration, the “noses” had no brief. “The perfumers were totally free to choose the art they wanted. There wasn’t even a budget,” he says, before breaking off into a cackle. “Actually, I said no Mona Lisa; that would have been far too obvious.”



Husband and wife duo Ramdane Touhami and Victoire de Taillac are behind the cult brand

The project took a year to realise, eight months of which were spent figuring out how his team could legally sell a perfume or a candle inspired by a work of art. “There are rights for images, rights for pictures but you don’t have the rights for an artwork’s smell. Actually,” he smiles, “I think I invented a business by accident.”

The collection for the Louvre comprises perfume, candles in travertine holders, scented soap sheets and scratch-and-sniff-style postcards which are on sale at the Louvre Museum and Buly stores in Paris from the beginning of July.

The collection is part of the museum’s new strategy to raise additional revenue from commercial merchandise by extending its global reach. But given that the Louvre could have chosen to work with any bastion of French luxury goods, why the relatively unknown Buly 1803?

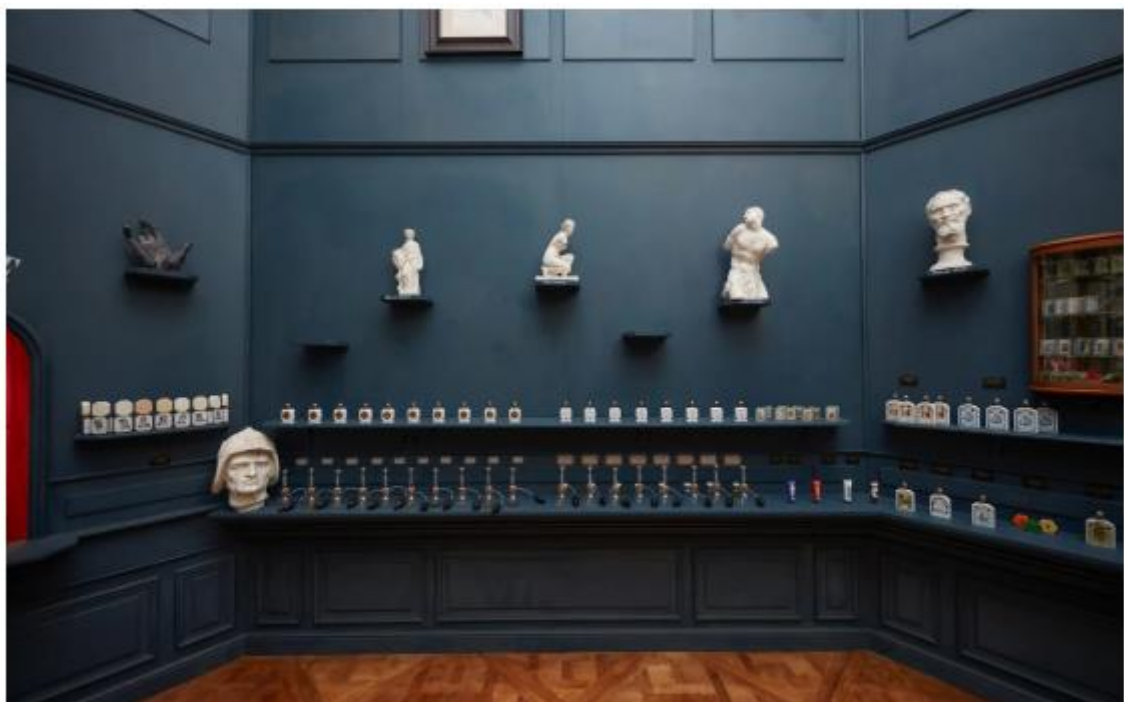
There's a Gallic 'bof' and shrug of the shoulders before Touhami says immodestly, "we make magic", before erupting into more laughter. He's right.

Buly 1803's cult packaging which references whimsical Belle Epoque illustrations is seemingly old fashioned and yet, the products are anything but. The lotions and potions are mostly water- rather than alcohol-based and free of parabens and silicone.

They're effective too: coriander toothpaste and sulphur-free matches which give off the scent of blackcurrant or ginger when lit. Popular too are its perfumed rocks, dissolvable soap paper or dental floss coated in flavoured natural beeswax, the sum of which makes for pure Instagram gold.

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Buly's store at the Louvre CREDIT: CLEMENT VAYSSIERES



Yann Le Touher, Head of Development and Commercial Partnerships & Brand for the museum puts it down to the dynamic nature of its founders.

"They're very inspiring and are such a great symbol of French entrepreneurialism, something I think is great for the Louvre to promote," he says.

"Also, Buly is a brand inspired by its patrimony and heritage, reinventing it in a fashionable and contemporary way. The eight perfumes reflect the diversity of the collection at the Louvre, everything from antiquities to masterpieces from the 17th and 18th century, and that is always a focus for us in any partnership."

De Taillac also thinks that the Louvre wanted to show that it is still an inspiration for creatives today: "it's perhaps why it did something with Beyoncé and the French artist Jean-Michel Othoniel," she says. "Its merchandising has been a bit classic, it was time to upscale."

Of the masterpieces that were chosen, it is perhaps the Grande Odalisque, Venus de Milo and the Winged Victory of Samothrace that are the most well-known: a blend of heliotrope, pink pepper and incense; an intoxicating combination of mandarin, jasmine and amber or a bouquet of tuberose and magnolia embraced by myrrh respectively.



But what of Ingres' Valpinçon Bather? In the hands of French nose, Daniela Andrier (who also created cult perfumes, Prada's Infusion d'Iris and Yves Saint Laurent: Rive Gauche ) the delicate and poetic painting has been translated with a stimulating burst of citronella and orange blossom and embellished with patchouli and incense.

The "Lock" meanwhile by Fragonard is about a lover's desire. "I wanted to illustrate the tension in the picture, that sense of urgency and chose to incorporate the scent of lilies which are both intense and sensual but also very bright," explains Delphine Lebeau.

A favourite of de Taillac is Gainsborough's Conversation in a Park which portrays the artist's wife and possibly Gainsborough himself, elegantly dressed in the fashion of the upper classes on an afternoon passeggiata. Dorothée Piot conjured up a bouquet of Ottoman roses with sour touches of peppermint and bergamot.

The Louvre provided the perfumers with historical information about the chosen artwork but ultimately the rejection of too much historical theory was, to some extent, supported by the Louvre.



"In a sense I was guided by emotions, it's how it makes you feel," says perfumer, Jean Christophe Herault who created the scent for Venus de Milo. "This feminine sculpture is almost like a real person, someone you feel could come alive at any moment."

*Available at Buly, Musée du Louvre and [buly1803.com](http://buly1803.com). Available in UK stores from Autumn 2019.*

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