

VOGUE

APR

ARE YOU READY
FOR THE RETURN
OF PREPPY CHIC?

WORD OF MOUTH
LIPSTICK ENTERS
ITS NEW ERA

THE JUGGLE IS REAL
PARENTING IN
AN OPEN
MARRIAGE

FASHION'S *All hail* FKA TWIGS!
COMING HOME

Mind READING

If what we FEEL shows up on our FACE, can a new line of skincare help to regulate our EMOTIONAL state? KATHLEEN BAIRD-MURRAY investigates the NEUROSCIENCE claiming to improve both COMPLEXION and MOOD



confession: sometimes at a press event my mind wanders. And the latest launch by new French skincare brand Neur/ae, owned by Sisley Paris, is no exception. The location – the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris, a spectacular wow-factor building with a domed glass ceiling – transports me along book after book of leather-bound spines, past the more modern collections of bandes dessinées, down the study tables, complete with individual green lights, now turned into a banqueting table just for today's launch. And I'm wondering... it must be here, somewhere: a copy of the poem by Paul Valéry. The one with the line, "The deepest thing in man is the skin." Because if it's here, it seems we have come full circle.

Our skin, we all must have noticed, is deeply connected to our emotions, sharing everything we feel with the world, our organ of sensibility. "Mental health issues can manifest in a number of ways," says professor Zoltan Sarnyai, head of the Laboratory of Psychiatric Neuroscience within the Australian Institute of Tropical Health and Medicine, and advisor to neuroscience-based supplement brand Ally, "which can lead to elevated cortisol levels and a histamine reaction. In one study between emotions and acne, 67 per cent of the patient group reported a relation between the onset of their acne and a stress-inducing event." We have known this instinctively, and visibly when we look in a mirror, since we were little, the poet Valéry has known this since the 19th century and now, it seems, the scientists know it too.

For Philippe d'Ornano, president of Sisley Paris, a hunch and a little poetry weren't quite enough: it was the advances in neuroscience over the last decade that compelled Sisley to develop a completely new brand. Neur/ae takes its name from "Neur", meaning "nerve" in Greek, and AE, which stands for "Acting on Emotions". Aiming to connect skincare with our wellbeing, Neur/ae arose from two separate scientific discoveries. "We found tools that allowed us to better understand how the brain works and how it connected with the rest of the body," he explains, "and from

then it was about identifying the neurotransmitters that connected with the skin: which were the good ones, which were the bad ones, do they have a cosmetic action or result that is positive? Can we enhance some neurotransmitters or modulate others? What with?"

Working with Mind Insight, a scientific organisation composed uniquely of university professors, and Neuron Experts, a research organisation that specialises in the study of neuroactive compounds, they were able to see the effect of the individual active ingredient on the emotional state after each formulation of cream was applied.

There are four key messengers in the brain that help influence skin function and quality by also working on our emotions: B-endorphin, which in the brain contributes to pleasure and also helps the skin to regenerate; GABA, a neurotransmitter that reduces stress and anxiety, and calms down inflammation in the skin; cortisol, which is well known for triggering stress levels, but can also weaken the skin barrier and make our skin more sensitive; and CGRP, which, when we have too much of it, makes us feel pain more readily and causes inflammatory stress.

Using a methodology inspired by the 2012 Nobel Prize for medicine, they were able to track the way the selected neuroactives – ingredients such as red indigo extract, which stimulates production of the B-endorphin and also limits cortisol production – then interacted with the brain, measuring neuron projection and neuromediator receptors on three distinct emotional states: tiredness, sadness and stress. The resulting collection of three creams, three booster roll-on fragrances and a serum also address the effect of texture and smell on our emotional responses. The Harmonie Serum, designed to restore a sense of calm, showed a 32 per cent reduction in skin cortisol when tested (over 21 days on a 3D model of reconstructed skin and human-sensitive neurons).

Will we ever reach a point when our skincare can also significantly help our mental health? D'Ornano says: "In France, it's one of the biggest costs of social security, up there with cancer and heart disease – we all know friends, relatives, families that have been impacted by it." A concern supported by Sisley, Neur/ae will donate one per cent of its turnover to associations that support emotional wellbeing. For now, though, the creams are definitely a joy to use, with those same smooth Sisley textures that fans of the mothership have come to love over the years, and natural aromas that make us feel uplifted or soothed, depending on which one you pick. And perhaps, in true French style, you wouldn't want to neutralise all your emotions anyway. Where's the poetry in that?

