

THE  AGE

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CULTURE AND LIFE

SATURDAY, MAY 12, 2007

BEST READING

- Robert Drewe** Remembering the good life
- Janice Breen Burns** Keep the carnations
- Tom Griffiths** Pride and polar madness
- Michael Leunig** A question of necessity
- David Hicks** Detainee 002
- Daniel Mendelsohn** A family odyssey

Julie Szego
on the bonds
unbroken by
time, distance
and regret.

The truth about motherhood



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'TIL YOU DROP

No thanks, love Mum



Motherhood does not neuter a woman's neurones or sense of style, despite what you hear, writes **Janice Breen Burns**.

JUST AS SURELY AS OUR congenital understanding of lawn bowls is activated by turning 60, so too does the state of motherhood bring instant connoisseurship of flannel floral jimjams, fluffy slippers and compilation albums by romantic ballad crooners. This is, apparently, the law.

And never mind what a hip-happening chickadee a woman has heretofore assumed herself to be, either. Childbirth is her defuser and deflator, the pebble that trips her into a bewildering demographic that will misunderstand her every day for the rest her life until "MUM" is lovingly spelt out in white carnations ("I hate carnations; why doesn't anybody listen to me?") on her ("Probably mahogany because I've always hated mahogany but, hey, who gives a toss what I like?") coffin.

"Yummy" appeared to acknowledge mummies could be sensual, with intellect, ego and stilettos.

A couple of years ago when the vaguely creepy term "Yummy Mummy" slid into the Sydney vernacular, then slithered south into everyday usage here, it seemed to transcend the problematic definitions of motherhood mothers find so irritating. "Yummy" appeared to acknowledge mummies could be sensual, with intellect, ego and stilettos.

The term arrived stealthily, like a cultural shift. Maybe it could fracture universal perceptions of Mummy-dom. Perceptions of desexed, defrocked nurturing domestics with limitless wellsprings of love for sensible

underpants, any-kid-no-matter-what, daytime TV and Michael Buble. Maybe this new expression — "Yummy Mummy" — described a vital, independent, multi-tasking woman with all her neurones in perfect working order and the kind of industrial-strength personal style you can only get, goddammit, from the blazing triumph of successful childbirth and kid-raising.

Well, wouldn't you know?

As it turned out, Y.M. loosely defined a Paris Hilton-esque 30-something whose maternity leave from her public relations account manager position had dawdled on so far past offspring Nos. 1 and 2 that she was now on fruit duty for No. 3. In her spare time, she plunged with the old bulldozer professionalism into co-ordinating nannies, shopping for pink Juicy-brand yoga suits and cheaper service deals on the BMW 4WD. And she frocked up such a spiky-heeled, glossy-lipped treat to hang on hubby's arm, she spurred the odd envious glint in other hubbies' eyes. This was her new job.

Which was nice, for some (particularly the hubbies). Yummy indeed. But it bumped every other mummy — of the vital, working neurones, blazing triumph variety — back to square one. Back to the universal assumption that, despite the most persuasive



spruiking by the lady on the Chanel perfume counter, or the one over at Tiffany's, she'd really rather we saved our money and bought her a nice nightie, or some hilarious piggy slippers, or a Buble album of soppy saccharine ballads for Mother's Day.

She wouldn't. Trust me. Beyond the mummy heart that seems to beat for a new Sunbeam from Kmart, or a portable barbecue from Bunnings, is a regal, elegant, high-heeled, perfumed, manicured, pedicured, massaged, moisturised, fantasy woman frocked to the nines in a dozen designer brands, waving a flute of French and wistfully wishing you wouldn't. Feed her. (Happy Mother's Day, Mum.)



GET THE LOOK

WHAT: Life With Bird Shout T
WHERE: Cactus Jam, David Jones and Cyberia
HOW MUCH? \$120,
lifewithbird.com.au

Seen last week at Fashion Week, the Life With Bird Shout T is a reminder that the slogan T-shirt trend is alive and kicking. Though we can thank sleazy messages favoured by the Hiltons and Richies of our time (e.g. "My boyfriend is out of town"), the trend says that as if email, internet, instant messages and Blackberries didn't provide enough communication options, we might like to keep talking even when we've got our mouths shut. With double-entendre-based slogans that mock many cultural accoutrements, perhaps the SHOUT T is simply reminding us how rude it is to capitalise in emails? Beware the wearing of a slogan T when you're having a quiet day. Strangers

feel free to strike up conversations and, really, it's no wonder, with your outfit shouting at them. It's a generous act, wearing a slogan T-shirt, like doing a community service. A good slogan serves to brighten my day, especially when the message seems mismatched with the wearer. A sturdy businesswoman at Tullamarine with "I'm big in Sweden". The dour bookseller with "You look hotter online". My favourite mocks the curious trend of splashing a message across your person, cheekily reminding others to give you some space, to go back into the self-imposed cocoon most city dwellers master at an early age. I was on a tram, rigidly adhering to such rules for tram rides by not making eye contact or staring too long. But I caught myself straining to finish reading the sentence written in minuscule letters on a stranger's back: "Nosy little parker, aren't we?"

LOUISA DEASEY



WHO IS ... MEGAN PARK

Thanks to sweatshops and the popularity of the mainstream megastore look, it's been relatively easy to throw a wardrobe together. Chain stores and mass-production lines offer five for the price of two, and voila, you've filled your drawers with enough junk for 12 months. But the popularity of movements such as "slow" and a vintage revival reveal the modern miss is moving away from such a casual attitude to her clothes. Fabrics that require hand-washing are back in vogue, along with all sorts of burlesque paraphernalia that force us to slow down and think about what we choose to cover our skin with. A quiet achiever of the fashion world, Melbourne-based Megan Park's creations are for all ages, as long as they like quality. With a celebrity fan base spanning generations X and Y (Julia Roberts, Nicole Kidman, Beyonce, Kate Hudson), Park says she has no "average" customer. She creates garments as far from the impersonality of the chain store as you could imagine, and every piece bearing her name has been created by hand. Paying top dollar for highly skilled artisans in India, it takes months for each item from her collection to be stitched, beaded or embroidered. It takes an average of two months to create each piece, from dye work to stitching. To buy one is to select an heirloom. Park has spent more than 15 years consulting on fabric collections



for other designers, finding the finest handwork and making a name everywhere from London to Hong Kong and New York, where her lines are stocked by, again, the best of the best: Liberty of London, Harvey Nichols, Neiman Marcus in New York and Joyce in Hong Kong are just some of her 180 stockists worldwide. People hold onto their Park creations like original paintings. While department stores ask us to gulp and gallop as we hurtle through life, Park implores us to slow down and enjoy the details of the journey one stitch at a time.

Empress ribbon angora jacket \$2440, slim wool skirt \$510, (02) 9360 9100. Stockists: Belinda and Husk, meganpark.co.uk

LOUISA DEASEY

IN SHOPS

WHAT Balance Water
WHERE Selected Coles, IGA and health food stores, balancewater.com.au

An interstate relationship, which saw me getting to know the petrol stops on the Hume Highway quite intimately, taught me that not all bottled water is the same. Refilling with tap water didn't cut it either, so thankfully Balance came along and had a difference other than just the bottle. Taking the lead with a bottled water that not only offers a healthy remedy to hormonal seesaws, they've also taken advantage of our native bush tucker and make sipping bottled water akin to a nurturing visit to the naturopath. Each of the four versions (women, travelling, children, regular) contain spring water infused with native Australian flower essences. Alternative health practitioners believe in the powers of flower essences to balance a stressed body for years, which is perhaps why health food shops were some of the first stockists of the Balance brand. Combining stress relief with the gaping market for bottled water was a smart move. Thanks to Balance, my road trips are less caffeinated and sugary affairs, with tap refills at Albury off the list. Car travel has never felt calmer. Sure, it could be the placebo effect, but if it makes you feel better about keeping up your eight-glasses-a-day rule, who cares?

LOUISA DEASEY

I MADE IT MYSELF

WHO Mekko, Lyndelle Flintoft
WHAT Bracelets and bags

I started Mekko about five years ago. I was travelling through India and came across some gemstones so I made myself a bracelet. When I returned to Australia, everyone loved it and wanted to know where they could get one. I did a small business course and went back to India and set up a small factory with three guys from Jaipur. I now spend three months of the year in India. It feels like a second home. Over the years I've had an amazing response to the jewellery. One woman said she got goose bumps when she put on a bracelet. I hand-pick each gemstone, so each piece is very special to me. I'm passionate about my work and I think that shows. I do a lot of sketching because I like my styles to change from year to year and I want the jewellery to reflect that. Right now I'm trying to track down million-year-old fossils to use in my work. I also make bags from eco leathers I import from Italy. It's an amazing cotton-microfibre blend that looks and feels like leather but is environment- and animal-friendly. Parker Australia in Ballarat manufactures all the bags. I've had a great response, women from 16 to 80 wear my bags, which is great. I'm always very busy but it helps me stay creative and focused. I'm lucky because I love what I do.
Stockists: Serenity, 366 Bay Street, Brighton; Wild Jam, 42 Pin Oak Crescent, Flemington, mekko.com.au

FRANCES ATKINSON

