
New York

SUNDAY ROUTINE

How Natalie Collette Wood, Program Director of the Bronx Children's Museum, Spends Her Sundays



Natalie Collette Wood aboard the Bronx Children's Museum's bus.

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By LISA W. FODERARO

JULY 24, 2015

Even after the new [Bronx Children's Museum](#) opens on the Harlem River in 2017, [Natalie Collette Wood](#), 33, the program director, will continue to share her peripatetic exhibits and mural-making aboard the organization's traveling bus. "This is the way we think a 21st-century museum should run," she said. "The Bronx is extremely hard to get across from east to west. We are out in the community building relationships." Sunday, then, is prime time to take the museum on the road. But Ms. Wood also schedules time for her own

artwork and to relax with her boyfriend, Victor Vildósola, 37, a musician, with whom she lives in the Morrisania section of the borough, along with a new puppy, a Chihuahua mix named Oliver.

HIGH-OCTANE START I wake up around 9, and my boyfriend and I eat breakfast together. During the week, I'm usually up at 6:30, so I try to sleep in on Sundays. I eat scrambled eggs. I like a high-protein breakfast, and I have a lot of coffee. I then go on the Internet to check the news and check the weather to see what kind of weather conditions I'm up against. And I get my supplies from my home studio — anything from extra paint to extra brushes and glue.

FESTIVAL APPEARANCE The museum is often in two or three places on a Sunday. Most of the time, I'll be with the bus. We got our bus in 2009, and we go to 30 parades and festivals a year. When we send the bus to a festival, we're kind of like a clown car. We unload multiple tables, a huge tent and art supplies, and basically we wait for the children to come. I usually lead any major art activities. Our whole setup is 46 feet long.

CRAFT SERVICES There is button-making. We have recycled materials to make bridges. We lead mural projects. The theme of the mural is always based on the event. If it's [Earth Day](#), we'll do an environment-themed mural. If it's at a botanical garden, it's flora-based. We could have anywhere from 20 to 100 children working on the canvas throughout the day. But I don't let more than five students paint at a time. They stay for 15 or 20 minutes. And I don't draw out the murals and have them fill in the shapes. I'll ask, "What do you think this mural needs?" I let them use their own talents and decision-making skills. In that way, I'm more like a composer.



Ms. Wood with her new puppy, Oliver.

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PUPPY LOVE After the festival, I go home. I have a puppy that I just got, and I like to relax and play with him. Someone in my building put three puppies in a box out on the street, and I'm a softy so I took one. I'm a big animal lover. I have two cats and a puppy now. He's 4 months old. He's too little to take out on walks. He only weighs three and a half pounds.

AN INDOOR GARDEN I try to take care of my house when I get home and then focus on my own artwork. I tackle whatever cleaning that I need to do and I water my plants. In my kitchen, there is a window garden with basil, tomatoes and rosemary. The tomato plant is three feet tall and we're praying for cherry tomatoes any day now. I have 12 plants in all.

NO BUS NEEDED With any energy I have left, I will go in my studio, which is in my apartment. In my free time, I'm always working on my own art. I have a Master of Fine Arts from Lehman College in the Bronx, which is how the children's museum found me. My studio is empty at the moment. I recently installed a solo show on West 30th Street at Eighth Avenue in Manhattan. It was through an arts organization called [Chashama](#) that takes

unused real estate and turns it into exhibition spaces. The title of the show was “[Futuristic Fossil](#).” I also make murals. I have a 100-foot mural made of moss that is up now at Montefiore Medical Center. It’s basically a collage made from preserved moss that has been dyed. I made a paste of wheat, yogurt and flour that serves as a temporary glue, which allows the collage to stick to the wall of a balcony at the hospital. It’s called the Green Yard Project.

SIMPLE REPAST I usually make dinner. It will be something very simple like a salad or pasta or some sort of chicken, something light. I’m wiped out from being in the sun so I go to bed pretty early. The festivals are tiring. I’m in bed at 10 or 10:30. Before I go to sleep, I check my email and try to prepare for anything coming up on Monday. I also might read or watch TV. I’ve been watching “[Grey’s Anatomy](#),” and I’m reading Patti Smith’s memoir “[Just Kids](#).”



Ms. Wood brings activities for kids to various festivals.

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Ms. Wood works on a 100-foot mural made of moss.

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