

[https://www.nola.com/entertainment\\_life/article\\_4fbc43c8-4953-5d59-a651-038159b9a848.html](https://www.nola.com/entertainment_life/article_4fbc43c8-4953-5d59-a651-038159b9a848.html)

# Cleo Wade takes the world by Instagram storm, returns to New Orleans for SweetArts Ball

BY SUE STRACHAN | [sstrachan@theadvocate.com](mailto:sstrachan@theadvocate.com) FEB 7, 2019 - 8:00 AM

1 of 2



Cleo Wade, a New Orleans native, has returned to be honored at the Contemporary Arts Center's SweetArts Ball, Feb. 9, 2019.

provided photo by Matthew Sprout

Boasting a wildly popular Instagram account, a knack for slogans and a cheery art style, New Orleans' own Cleo Wade is the picture of a modern "It Girl" and Internet sensation.

A product of St. Mary's Dominican High School, she's now a New York artist and poet whose gauzy affirmations earned her the label "Millennial Oprah" in a New York Magazine article.

She's published a book of poetry, "Heart Talk" (Simon & Schuster); is part of a New York-based female arts collective called Chez Conversation; and has penned large-scale text installations in New Orleans, New York, Toronto and Los Angeles.



cleowade  
541.6k followers

[View Profile](#)

EVERY HUMAN  
BEING DESERVES  
HUMAN RIGHTS.

[View More on Instagram](#)

15,227 likes

Add a comment...

She's been featured in The New York Times, Vogue, Elle, W, Glamour, Essence and the New York Post's celebrity gossip site Page Six, which opined that she was dating New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker in 2016. (Wade dodged the question.)

And Saturday, the 30-year-old will get a nod from her hometown arts community when she serves as honorary chairwoman and an honoree of the Contemporary Arts Center's SweetArts Ball.

Wade's Instagram alternates portraits of her -- usually modeling the latest looks -- with other photos, poems and slogans.

"Real leaders lead with love," "And maybe the best present is to be present" and "Every human being deserves human rights" are among the aphorisms, hand-written in capital letters, that have attracted upward of 477,000 followers to her Instagram, @CleoWade ("Poetic wisdom for a better life").

"It is such an instant way to speak with my community and show my care for them," she said. Her affirmations and poetry resonate with a wide audience. "I hope it is because they know I write it for them with love and honesty," she said in an email from Europe. "Love fuels all of my work."

After Dominican High School, Wade moved to the Big Apple in 2006. "By the time she turned 19, Wade had talked her way into a job as an

office manager at the newly relaunched fashion house Halston, a gig she'd coveted mostly because it had a female CEO, Bonnie Takhar," the New York Magazine article said.

Fashion houses clamor for Wade to wear or design their clothes; Barney's had her collaborate with designer Maria Cornejo to create the Zero + Maria Cornejo capsule collection for Resort 2017. Her poems have been stenciled on Nike AF1sneakers, and Gucci named her of one of its Voices of Self-Expression, using her art for its Chimes for Change, a campaign founded to unite girls and women globally.

She was a national surrogate for Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign, a member of the creative council of the women's political action committee Emily's List; and a board member of the National Black Theatre in Harlem.

Wade has been propelled by her way with words, starting when she first posted her affirmations on Instagram five years ago. The slogans are sometimes brightened with a color

wash that adds artistic flair. Other times they're typewritten, particularly if the message is longer or structured as an ode.

“Instagram was the easiest for me because all I do is take photos of my notebooks. I don't love typing on the phone or computer,” Wade said.

Wade is being honored for art and poetry at the ball. Other honorees are Carol Bebelle, co-founder of Ashe Cultural Arts Center, for visual arts; Cameron-Mitchell Ward, performer and teaching artist, for arts education; Aurora Nealand, musician, for performing arts; and posthumously, Dorothy Coleman, artist and founder of the New Orleans Academy of Fine Arts, for philanthropy.

“We are so thrilled to have a young poet and author like Cleo Wade serve as the honorary chair of the SweetArts 2019,” said MK Wegmann, interim executive director of the center. “By supporting the CAC, Cleo demonstrates her love and her commitment to artists and to her hometown of New Orleans.”





**cleowade**  
Los Angeles, California

[View Profile](#)



[View More on Instagram](#)

14,799 likes

Add a comment...

Wade's parents, Lori Rockett and Bernardo Wade, divorced when she was 6. Her mother is a chef and a caterer. "I am a vegan," Wade said, "until I enter my mom's kitchen. She's annoyed that I won't eat meat, but I will have a little seafood when I'm with her. My mom's crab cakes are the best I've ever had."

Wade's father is known for his sense of style; he's often seen around town at parties in a suit and fedora. "There is no one more stylish than my father," Wade said. "I always loved the way he dressed growing up because it instilled in me the importance of being yourself and having fun with who you are. My dad is never bored because he does everything with style, humor and joy." In addition to his artwork, Bernardo also was known as the personal photographer of former Mayors Dutch Morial and Ray Nagin.

Wade remembers going into her father's darkroom to develop film. "I still love darkrooms till this day because they remind me of seeing my dad's joy in his work," she said.

Busy as she may be, Wade is always thrilled to come home. She's looking forward to eating at her mom's house, walking along the streetcar



tracks — “while stopping for cocktails along the way” — and gossiping with one of her best friends in New Orleans, Stevie Elem (Stevona Elem-Rogers), the founder of Black Women Are For Grown Ups, a digital campaign to celebrate and heighten the visibility of black women.

“I love the trees, the way they seem to hug each other above the neutral ground. I miss jazz on the streets, the strange French Quarter characters,” Wade said.

Now she can add the SweetArts Ball — something she hadn’t attended before — to her New Orleans experiences.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Contemporary Arts Center SweetArts Ball "Made with Love"**

When: Saturday (Feb. 9)

Time: 6:30 p.m. to midnight

Where: CAC, 900 Camp St.

Tickets: Gala: \$150/\$175 members/general admission; Patron Party and Gala: \$300/\$350 for member/general admission; and Late Night

Party: \$60/\$40 general admission/artist or student.

Tickets: [501auctions.com/sweetarts](http://501auctions.com/sweetarts)

---

FOLLOW SUE STRACHAN ON TWITTER, FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM @SUESTRACHAN504.

## You May Like

Sponsored Links by Taboola

### **The Shake Shack Ordering Secret You Need To Know**

Wikibuy

### **This Amazon Upgrade is Even Better Than Prime**

Honey

### **U.S. Cardiologist: It's Like a Pressure Wash for Your Insides**

Gundry MD Total Restore Supplement

### **Shut The Front Door! The New Audi Lineup Is Simply Astonishing!**

Audi Cars | Search Ads

### **Here's What an Online College Degree Should Cost in 2019 in New Orleans**

Online Degrees | Search Ads

### **Our \$5 Wines Are Better Than Most \$50 Wines**

Firstleaf

### **If You Like to Play, this City-Building Game is a Must Have. No Install.**

Forge of Empires - Free Online Game

### **Earth Origins Randi Radley - Womens Boot -**

**\$105 - earthshoes.com**

---

**MORE FROM THE ADVOCATE**

- Could LSU's Joe Burrow be the No. 1 draft pick? Some experts think so; here's why
- Lafayette attorney permanently disbarred for stealing from clients
- Rabalais: Saints RB Latavius Murray proves he's much more than Alvin Kamara's stand in
- St. George Fire Department calls for Oct. 13-19
- Two people injured in overnight shooting on N. Foster Drive

**MORE FROM OUR PARTNERS**

- 
- 
- 
- 

Recommended by

|