



# SHENZHEN GETS AN ART INFUSION

## Jardin Orange Art Residency Adds Color to the Scene

By Sky Thomas Gidge

Ceet Fouad sits in his Shenzhen office with two heavy binders of press clippings on the desk to his left and a pen held like a paintbrush between his thumb and index finger. He is sketching the frame of a canvas for an upcoming live-painting event.

"Ownership will be maintained by the artists," Fouad stresses, before explaining what sort of truck will be needed to transport the large canvas panels.

Fouad's ability to organize, coordinate a busy schedule and – perhaps most of all – market the art that he produces is what has allowed him to work with about 400 companies, by his count, including Adidas and Prada. Originally beginning as a French graffiti artist, his work has made it into galleries from Hong Kong to New York City.

It's the same prowess that has earned him the directorial role in an ambitious project set to revolutionize Shenzhen's art scene: Jardin Orange.

The project is supported by the Montresso Art Foundation, which operates Jardin Rouge in Morocco, a residency for contemporary artists founded in 2007 that has seen today's most promising contemporary artists work within its red-brick walls.

But how will a city better known for assembly lines than art shows attract high-caliber artists? Through connections Fouad has spent decades making.

"When I find someone I feel has a little bit of talent," he begins, completing his thought by moving his hands in the air as if picking up artists and dropping them in Shenzhen.

Jardin Orange is positioned at the heart of SoFunLand, a quickly developing area full of student apartments in Xili, Nanshan District. The hope seems to be that a young population combined with a budding art scene will tap again into the bohemian vibe that has made OCT Creative Park a Shenzhen landmark.

SoFunLand expects to have 2,000 residents by Chinese New Year and has confirmed two incubators and the possibility of an extreme sports park, according to the area's CEO.

But to interest Fouad in the project, the developers had to give him an offer that was difficult to refuse. "They said, 'Yeah, we can give you something for free. We can give you a building,'" he says. "Now, this place is like my kindergarten."

After an electric cart ride down one of the pedestrian streets that make up 380,000-square-meter SoFunLand, Fouad strides into a three-story pumpkin-colored building and details his plans for Jardin Orange room by room.

"This will be a gallery," he gestures at a back wall. "And here will be a recording studio." We ascend one floor and he continues:

"This is the varnish room, here is storage, this is an office." We climb another flight and Fouad points down a hallway filled with construction workers, bags of concrete and wires hanging from the ceiling. "These are going to be luxury rooms."

Those rooms will be set aside for the project's engine, purchasers visiting Shenzhen to check out what the dozen-or-so confirmed international artists produce under Fouad's guidance in 2017.

"I'm an artist, but I'm also an art director," says Fouad, explaining how he will guide artists towards commercially viable work. "Every month we have to prove that our business is growing and making money – we have to pay the bills. It's all about bringing art to Shenzhen, but at the end of the day we need to sell."

