The evening art projections at the new Belltower space of Brisbane’s Institute of Modern Art (IMA) are about much more than bringing extra colour and movement to the popular Brunswick Street. Rather, says new Director Liz Nowell, the project has been an excellent learning process for both artists and staff. ‘And it is a wonderful way to bring art to a wider public and enliven the building in the public realm,’ Nowell says.

Nowell describes the projection schedule for the Judith Wright Centre of Contemporary Arts facade as having been very experimental and exciting so far, working with artists such as Daniel McKewen, whose Promissory Estoppel (until 8 February 2020) draws on his investigations into the intersections of contemporary art, popular culture, economics, politics and screen-based mass media.

The Belltower venture comes as no surprise for an organisation that has expanded its program substantially over the past five years. Nowell has been pleased to arrive at the IMA at a time when it is physically growing. With 20 per cent more exhibiting space being allotted via the refurbished Belltower, a bar and cafe is also opening in the front of the centre – essential for any contemporary museum.

The new IMA Belltower space is having a focus on Queensland stories and artists, with artist Sancintya Mohini Simpson being commissioned to produce a large body of work for late February next year examining colonisation and the impact on her family history. In the main gallery, curator Freja Carmichael is developing what will be a major touring exhibition of freshwater and saltwater fibre practice from across Australia. Opening in May, it will be accompanied by a substantial publication and a weekend-long fibre symposium that will bring weavers from across Australia to celebrate this practice among First Nations cultures.

Nowell says that while the IMA has a history over more than four decades of an inclusive and diverse program, it has excelled particularly in supporting and presenting First Nations artists. ‘So, over the next four to five years we are focused on embedding First Nations voices within the organisation. It was an interesting time for me coming into this organisation in June and working on its strategic plan,’ she says. ‘It is about recognising the value in having a truly diverse workplace – a truly sustainable organisation that offers a breadth of experiences and ways to view contemporary art.’

Liz Nowell; image courtesy the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane; photo: Sia Duff