Timothy Rodgers, the new director of the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art (SMoCA), has great plans for the museum, housed in a sleek, minimalist building located across from the Scottsdale Center for the Performing Arts. Many of his plans may stretch visitors’ minds about the notion of just what “contemporary art” should include.

“We’re devoted to contemporary design and architecture impacting the community, as well as contemporary (visual) art,” stresses Rodgers.

An exhibition that exemplifies Rodgers’ view of SMoCA’s mission is the eagerly anticipated show “Bridges: Spanning the Ideas of Paolo Soleri,” a collaboration between the museum, Scottsdale Public Art and the Cosanti Foundation. Celebrating the work of Soleri, an innovative Arizona arts pioneer, the exhibition, opens Oct. 9. The exhibit will come on the heels of Soleri’s 90th birthday and the opening of the Scottsdale Waterfront Bridge that bears his name.

Before being hired to lead SMoCA in November, Rodgers was chief curator for the New Mexico Museum of Art, where he oversaw exhibitions focused on modernist and contemporary art and appeared frequently in podcasts and videos that made those works of art more accessible to the public. He’s also influenced the art world as a writer, lecturer and academic, first at Brown University, where he earned his Ph.D., and then as a tenured professor at Lawrence University.

Rodgers says he was inspired by ASU professors Anthony Gulley and Claudia Brown, as well as museum director Rudy Turk, when studying for his undergraduate degree. He experienced a vocational epiphany of sorts here, he says.

“There wasn’t any question about devoting my life to art,” he said.

And just as the academic resources of the university propelled him into the art world, the nexus of talent and support for the arts in the Phoenix metropolitan area have drawn him back here for the SMoCA position.

“The creative wealth offered by ASU and the rewarding partnerships that can be formed (here) greatly contributed to my enthusiastic return to the Valley,” says Rodgers, whose father and brothers also reside here.

That choice will undoubtedly delight art lovers in the years to come.

By Oriana Parker, a Scottsdale-based freelance arts writer.