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Nicoline Refsing
Founder and creative director
Rockart Design

COMPOSING IN SPACE

By James Groves

Nicole Refsing lives in London and is the founder and main creative force behind Rockart Design, which specialises in the design, creative direction and artistic delivery of high-end TV shows, tours, festivals and events, both in the UK and internationally. She began her career working with architect Mark Fisher, tracking him down after watching a Rolling Stones concert he had designed. After six months of working as intern, Refsing was offered a paid role and stayed working with Fisher for the next six years. Since starting out on her own, she has worked on the Brit Awards, National Television Awards and Eurovision Song Contest and can count One Direction, Little Mix and Olly Murs among her clients.

After growing up in Copenhagen, Refsing went on to study at Denmark's Royal Academy. "I was very fortunate that as part of my master's degree I was exchanged to a Japanese university and I went over there to study traditional Japanese architecture," she says. "I watched them compose in space, and that's where everything settled for me. I thought 'I know what they do'. I could see what they do with different textures, the surfaces. Even the acoustics in the room were planned, and the viewing angles: the foreground, the middle ground and the background, all of that fell into place."

Refsing's hard work has caught the attention of some major show producers in recent years: "The National Television Awards contacted me when they were moving to the O2 from the Royal Albert Hall. I helped them scale up that show, which was really interesting, and also

position it visually as a brand, and as brand experience. I worked with them on the core values of the show, and working out how to convey in the design and the experience you get when you go into the arena. Because I've got my design background and I have such a good knowledge of what technically and practically brings a show together, it's been very interesting to do those kinds of things."

One of the biggest shows Refsing has been involved in was the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest, where she was appointed creative director and content producer for the whole show; no mean feat. "We created the 37 performances on the show. Once you get to grips with the structure and the rhythm of the show, you start working with the dramatic turns and how it all aligns, you have your quiet moment, you have your big moment, you make it exciting, relevant and authentic.

"With Eurovision, I had two ambitions," Refsing explains. "I didn't want any library stock on the screen. It was all bespoke and created from scratch, and I wanted to create a unique look for everyone. Everyone appearing on that show should come out and feel that they have a completely unique space. In many ways, we succeeded. Some of the acts needed a little set piece, which I designed and then added to the performance, but I always work with the artist and see what their strengths are. Do they fill out a big space? Do they need a big space? Are they stronger in a confined space? It's about amplifying the story they're trying to tell.

"I think a good show has to be visually appealing. It has to catch people's interest," says Refsing. "It's got to be authentic, it's got to have a storytelling element to it, it's got to be relevant, and most importantly, it's got to be something that touches people."