



# MADNESS MADE ME

Director: Nikki Castle Producer: Alexander Gandar

Down the end of the long polished corridor, Mary O'Hagan comes face to face with the condemning words written about her in her psychiatric files.

**PREMIERING AT NZIFF 19 JULY 2015  
AVAILABLE ONLINE FROM 20 JULY 2015**

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

*Madness Made Me* is a visual poem that grapples with two very different accounts of one person's madness, and in doing so addresses issues of the power of language, asking: is there value in madness?

## LONG SYNOPSIS

Down the end of the long polished corridor, Mary O'Hagan comes face to face with the condemning words written about her in her psychiatric files.

Armed with an old journal from her time in and out of New Zealand's psychiatric wards, Mary confronts two contrasting accounts of her experience: the one professionals were so quick to diagnose, and the one that she herself lived, and attempted to make meaning from. Her own account exists within the pages of her journal, and on the wall of an empty psychiatric ward she challenges the experts who reduced her to a mere illness.

*Madness Made Me* is a small film with big questions to ask. Who defines madness? Can madness be meaningful? This visual poem grapples with conflicting representations of one person's madness, and in doing so tackles issues like the power of language, and the power of experience.

## Director: Nikki Castle

Nikki Castle graduated from the University of Auckland with a Masters in Screen Production, and has a long-standing career as an editor of documentary in New Zealand and Canada. She has edited numerous award-winning television series', including *The Green Chain* (Best Documentary at the NZ Film & TV Awards).

Nikki splits her time between Auckland and Melbourne, where she directs commercials, short documentaries, and music videos. She has an acute interest in political and social issues, particularly through an often-neglected female perspective, and is currently developing a comedy web series with Australian comedian Nat Harris.

## Producer: Alexander Gandar

Alexander began his career producing music videos alongside the completion of a Masters in Screen Production at the University of Auckland. His career highlights thus far include directing music videos for The Veils and Chelsea Jade, the assistant direction of Tim Van Dammen's internationally successful feature *Romeo & Juliet: A Love Song*, co-producing Matthew Saville's award-winning short film *Dive*, and producing Aidee Walker's soon-to-be-released short film *Break In The Weather*.

He and Aidee are the co-founders of Humans, an independent production company dedicated to the creation of unique visual arts.



## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

*Madness Made Me* is the cinematic exploration of a subject that often defies description. Through the exposition of two different accounts of one person's madness – the doctor's and the patient's – a stark and frightening disconnect is revealed.

Things may have changed in New Zealand mental health since the 1980s, in part due to the decades of work done by the film's subject Mary O'Hagan, but societies the world over still tend to privilege the opinions of 'experts' over first-hand experience. My hope is that this film not only encourages independent thought on issues surrounding mental health, but also instills a deeper understanding of what it might mean for a person to experience 'madness', and questions how as a society we might emphasize the value of these experiences.

Loading Docs has provided a foundation for learning to create impactful stories within strong boundaries. As a director, I've come away with a much greater understanding and appreciation for short format films. It's forced me to be intensely critical of every frame of the film, from the script right through to the colour grade. I also believe that this short format helps films find an audience where they might otherwise be too confronting or too niche.

## PRESS RELEASE

Dresses unconventionally, makes poor eye-contact, appears as if she resents being called to a meeting to talk about herself – are all notes made in a Dunedin psychiatric ward about Mary O'Hagan as evidence of her "schizoid nature." Now more than thirty-five years on, O'Hagan is a world leader in mental health, speaking at international conferences and working as an advisor to the United Nations and the World Health Organisation. She is also the subject of 3-minute mini-documentary *Madness Made Me*, directed by Nikki Castle and one of ten films being launched online as part of the Loading Docs initiative.

The film creatively explores the relationship between the notes that O'Hagan's doctors made about her while she was in their care and her own internal dialogue as documented in her journals from the time. O'Hagan was told by psychiatrists that she would never hold down a job, that she should never have children, that she was now and always would be mad. Despite the disempowering labels that were placed on her throughout her 8-year stint within the New Zealand mental health system, O'Hagan has risen above and used her experiences to educate others and become a leading innovator in changing New Zealand's – and the world's – understanding of mental health.

Director Castle has similar intentions with her film and says she wants the mini-doc to make people think about the power of language and reevaluate our "deficits-based attitude to mental distress". She hopes that people will come away from the film understanding that the expression 'what doesn't kill you makes you stronger' is equally applicable within the field of mental health as it is within any other context.

The Loading Docs initiative supports 10 filmmaking teams to experiment with the confines of a 3-minute timeframe to make innovative and creative documentaries that tell New Zealand stories, this year based around the theme of connection. *Madness Made Me* has been selected to premiere at the NZ International Film Festival on 19th July, screening before the feature *Dreamcatcher*, after which it will be available to view online at [www.loadingdocs.net](http://www.loadingdocs.net) and on [TVNZ OnDemand](#).

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