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Richard McLean (Australia)

Richard McLean (born 1973) is an Australian graphic artist, mental health advocate whose memoir *Recovered, Not Cured: Schizophrenia* (2003) chronicles his diagnosis with schizophrenia, psychiatric treatment, and eventual functional recovery and self-determination.^{[1][2]} Working as a news graphics designer at newspapers including *The Age* and *The Herald Sun*, McLean's artwork, led a rock band, and pursued advanced qualifications of Fine Arts, Master of Education, and PhD candidacy at the University of Melbourne.

The book, his first, earned the SANE Book of the Year award and commendation in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission for arts non-fiction in 2003, highlighting its role in demystifying mental illness via personal narrative and illustrations.^[1] McLean has spoken from lived experience, speaking at venues like Australian National University and McGill University on recovery models prioritizing individual experiences over pathologizing deficits.^[4]

In a 2019 submission to the Royal Commission into Victorian Mental Health System, McLean detailed systemic shortcomings, including fragmented services, inadequate crisis response, and over-reliance on medication without addressing personal histories or strengths; he challenged the view of schizophrenia as a "myth" while emphasizing self-reliance and community support as keys to sustained wellness amid critiques of psychiatric institutionalization. He underscores empirical recovery trajectories—such as independent living post-diagnosis—against institutional narratives often favoring perpetual dependency.^[1]



Theme



Light



Dark

Early Life and Background



Childhood and Family Influences

McLean grew up in a family environment he later described as toxic and homophobic, compelling him to hide his sexual orientation until age 26, in the late 1990s.^[4] This suppression, amid familial expectations of heterosexuality, fostered deep shame and isolation that contributed to his emerging mental health challenges.^[4]

He attributes the onset of his mental health issues to childhood sexual abuse, marking it as a pivotal early trauma without specifying the perpetrator or exact circumstances.^[4] Family members attempted support during his later schizophrenia episodes but displayed stigmatizing attitudes, exemplified by his brother's remark that he would not hire a schizophrenic in his company, reflecting broader familial misunderstanding and rejection.^[4]

Despite these dynamics, McLean engaged in artistic practice from an early age, though family relations involved some misunderstanding of his pursuits, as noted in his reflective academic work.^{[5][4]} No evidence indicates direct parental encouragement of his creative interests; instead, family interactions underscored emotional barriers that paralleled his internal struggles.^[4]

Initial Artistic Interests

McLean's initial artistic interests emerged during his childhood. He has described engaging in artistic practice from a young age, stating that he has been creating art "most of his life," which laid the foundation for his later professional work in illustration and graphic design.^[4]

These early pursuits were informal and self-directed, reflecting a personal

inclination toward visual expression. By the early 1990s, McLean formalized his interests through tertiary studies in drawing, a period during which he began exploring artistic themes tied to personal experiences, including reflections on childhood and societal questions. This transition from casual sketching to structured education coincided with the onset of mental health challenges but highlighted art as a consistent outlet for processing inner narratives.^[4]

His longstanding dedication to art, evidenced by over two decades of making and exhibiting works by 2019, underscores how these initial interests evolved into a core element of his identity, predating formal diagnosis or career milestones.^[4] McLean's early drawings, later incorporated into his autobiographical writings, served as a medium for documenting paranoia recollections from adolescence onward, blending creative exploration with emerging psychological insights.^[6]

Professional Career in Arts

Graphic Design and Illustration Roles

McLean served as a news graphics artist for the Melbourne newspapers *The Herald Sun* and *The Age*, producing illustrations and visual elements for news content using both traditional and digital techniques.^[3]^[7] His work at *The Age* spanned approximately five years, focusing on graphic design contributions to journalistic storytelling.^[7]

In addition to newspaper roles, McLean has engaged in broader illustration and digital art projects, including web design and portfolio pieces that demonstrate his versatility in visual communication.^[7]^[3] These efforts highlight his professional application of artistic skills in media and multimedia contexts, often blending narrative illustration with technical graphic production.^[8]

Musical and Multimedia Contributions

McLean pursued music in his youth, leading a rock band named Bruvura and performing and recording in punk rock and pop genres as a self-described young existentialist.^{[8][5]} These activities reflected an experimental approach to sound and personal expression, though no commercial releases from this period are documented.

In later years, McLean shifted toward folk and singer-songwriter styles, uploading a collection titled *Welcome to Tuesday* to SoundCloud around 2015.^[9] This set includes tracks such as "Undertow," "Love Crime," "30,000 Feet," and "Quality Control," categorized under folk genres with modest play counts indicating niche distribution rather than widespread commercial success.^[9]

His multimedia contributions blend visual art with audio and digital elements, as evidenced by his SoundCloud profile's emphasis on "art, illustration, multimedia and creativity."^[9] As a digital artist, McLean integrates illustration into broader creative outputs, though specific multimedia projects combining his music and visuals remain primarily self-published and exploratory. No major collaborative or institutional multimedia works are recorded in available sources.

Literary and Autobiographical Works

Key Publications on Personal Experience

Richard McLean's seminal autobiographical work, *Recovered, Not Cured: A Journey Through Schizophrenia*, was published in 2003 by Allen & Unwin.^[1] The book provides a first-person account of his diagnosis with schizophrenia in the early 1990s, detailing the onset of symptoms such as paranoid delusions, auditory hallucinations, and social withdrawal during his university years in Melbourne.^[10] McLean describes the initial dismissal by family and friends of his deteriorating

mental state, followed by involuntary hospitalization and treatment with antipsychotic medications like risperidone, which induced side effects including weight gain and cognitive dulling.^[11]

Integrating visual elements, the publication features McLean's digital artworks produced amid psychotic episodes, serving to externalize and document his perceptual distortions, such as fragmented realities and persecutory themes.^[10] These illustrations, created using early computer graphics software, complement the narrative by offering readers a non-verbal glimpse into the subjective experience of psychosis, emphasizing how art facilitated his self-objectification and partial recovery.^[11] McLean recounts achieving functional remission by the late 1990s through medication adherence, lifestyle adjustments, and creative outlets, though he stresses ongoing vulnerability rather than full cure, challenging overly optimistic recovery narratives.^[1]

The work has been noted for its raw candor and utility in demystifying schizophrenia for non-experts, with reviewers highlighting its role in bridging personal testimony and broader mental health discourse.^[11] No subsequent full-length autobiographies by McLean on his experiences have been widely published, though he has shared excerpts and reflections in advocacy submissions, such as his 2019 testimony to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, reiterating themes of systemic failures in early intervention.^[4]

Themes and Reception

McLean's primary autobiographical work, *Recovered, Not Cured: A Journey Through Schizophrenia* (2003), centers on the progression of his psychotic symptoms, including auditory hallucinations, paranoia, and elaborate delusions such as controlling street lights or interpreting secret messages from loudspeakers, often intertwined with personal identity struggles like ambivalence toward bisexuality amid societal homophobia.^[12]^[13] The narrative emphasizes the

tension between subjective internal experiences and external reality validation, portraying schizophrenia not as a complete erasure but as an ongoing negotiation where "magical insights" provide bittersweet comfort even post-recovery.^[12] Integrated illustrations, drawn by McLean himself, visually depict these delusions—such as root systems symbolizing family genograms—and accompany textual commentaries that elucidate their psychological origins, underscoring art's role in processing and externalizing psychosis.^[12]

A recurring theme is recovery as functional adaptation rather than eradication, highlighting community-based management over institutionalization, with antipsychotic medication aiding but not resolving the condition; McLean maintains employment as a graphic artist, musical pursuits, and social ties while acknowledging persistent perceptual idiosyncrasies.^[13]^[12] The book demystifies mental illness by contextualizing symptoms within everyday Australian adolescent life, critiquing overly dramatic historical portrayals and advocating empathy for affected families, dedicating the work to those seeking understanding amid isolation and fear.^[13]

Reception has been positive among mental health advocates and reviewers, with the book awarded SANE Australia's Book of the Year in 2004 for its candid insights into lived schizophrenia.^[12] Critics praise its "compulsively readable" and "quirky" style, which eschews a reductive psychiatric resolution in favor of an open-ended, postmodern narrative that humanizes the illness without imposing moral closure, making it valuable for professionals, patients, and families.^[12] The Sydney Morning Herald review lauds its direct demystification of psychosis, enhanced by humorous elements and digital artwork, positioning McLean as emblematic of modern, community-integrated mental health management over past asylum-era approaches.^[13] Disability Studies Quarterly analysis affirms its vivid honesty in chronicling schizophrenia's personal toll, though noting its focus remains narrowly autobiographical rather than broadly analytical.^[11]

Mental Health Journey and Recovery

Diagnosis and Treatment Experiences

Richard McLean first experienced symptoms of mental illness during adolescence, including paranoia and auditory hallucinations such as hearing voices from beyond a backyard fence, which he later interpreted as early indicators of schizophrenia.^[14] These progressed to delusions involving encoded messages from license plates, radios, and disembodied voices, prompting self-medication with alcohol and marijuana, which exacerbated his condition.^[14] By 1994, while in Edinburgh, McLean endured acute psychosis, crouching in alleys under beliefs of surveillance via video cameras and targeted broadcasts, fearing physical harm, marking a severe escalation that led him to seek professional help.^[14]

McLean received multiple diagnoses over time, including paranoid schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, schizoaffective disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, PTSD, dissociative states, and panic disorder, assigned by various psychiatrists and psychologists.^[4] He has expressed doubt regarding the validity of these labels, describing schizophrenia as a "myth" and critiquing psychiatric practices for pathologizing human experiences like grief, sexuality, and spirituality for institutional gain, while overlooking strengths or alternative explanations such as childhood sexual abuse and familial homophobia.^[4]

Treatment primarily involved antipsychotic medications enforced via Community Treatment Orders (CTOs), which mandated compliance and resulted in side effects including weight gain, lethargy, tremors, sexual dysfunction, and sleep apnea.^[4] McLean underwent multiple hospitalizations in psychiatric inpatient units, characterized by restrictive environments with bolted furniture and limited outdoor access, where interventions focused on symptom suppression through medication to render patients socially compliant rather than addressing root

causes.^[4] He also attempted suicide with a lethal opioid dose prescribed by a doctor despite disclosed intent, leading to resuscitation and further psychiatric admission, highlighting perceived systemic negligence.^[4]

At approximately age 44, McLean successfully reduced and discontinued antipsychotic reliance with psychologist support, transitioning to minimal daily medication that maintains stability but induces mild lethargy, enabling independent functioning including employment and advocacy.^[4]^[14] He attributes limited efficacy of treatments to the system's overemphasis on pharmacology and coercion, such as seclusion and CTOs, amid resource shortages, advocating instead for self-directed recovery informed by personal resilience over professional intervention.^[4]

Path to Recovery Through Art

McLean integrated artistic practice into his recovery from schizophrenia as a primary means of externalizing delusions and hallucinations, thereby gaining psychological distance from them. During periods of acute symptoms, he pursued a Bachelor of Fine Arts, studying art amid altered perceptions influenced by delusional ideas, which allowed him to channel psychotic experiences into creative output.^[12] His illustrations, often quirky and reflective of internal turmoil, served to objectify paranoia and voices, as seen in works depicting messages from license plates or disembodied sources, reflecting symptoms that began in adolescence and escalated around 1994.^[14]

In his 2003 autobiography *Recovered, Not Cured: A Journey Through Schizophrenia*, McLean pairs verbal accounts with self-created digital artwork, enhancing the narrative by visually amplifying the essence of mental illness and providing insight into psychotic thinking.^[12] This method proved therapeutic, enabling him to confront, learn from, and educate others about his condition through three phases: confrontation, learning, and advocacy.^[8] He has described creativity as an outlet that makes life bearable "in spite of" rather than because of

schizophrenia, emphasizing its role in holistic well-being over pathologizing labels.^[8]

Professionally, McLean sustained artistic engagement by working as an illustrator for Melbourne newspapers like *The Age* and *The Herald Sun*, exhibiting works for over two decades, teaching classes, and running workshops, which reinforced his agency and stability.^[4] He has publicly advocated for art's role in recovery, speaking at venues including the Australian Parliament and McGill University, where he highlighted its superiority to some psychiatric interventions in fostering healing through lived experience.^[4] As a consumer consultant in psychiatric wards, he promoted art therapy programs, observing increased patient artwork and recommending greater funding, underscoring art's practical value in institutional settings.^[4] Today, he applies these insights as an NDIS-registered art-life coach, aiding marginalized individuals via creative expression.^[15]

Advocacy and Public Engagement

Speaking Engagements and Awards

McLean received the SANE Australia Book of the Year award in 2004 for his 2003 memoir *Recovered, Not Cured: A Journey Through Schizophrenia*, recognizing its contribution to public understanding of psychosis experiences.^[14]^[1] The same publication was highly commended in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's awards, highlighting its advocacy for mental health rights.^[14]

In public speaking, McLean has served as a keynote speaker at events including the 34th Annual Mental Health Nurses Conference in Melbourne and exhibitions for Art Against Stigma in Sydney, focusing on lived experiences of schizophrenia and recovery through art.^[16] He has presented internationally at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, to philosophical and religious studies groups, as well as at Douglas Hospital's psychiatric care unit, emphasizing ethical and personal

perspectives on mental illness.^[16]

Domestically, McLean addressed Parliament House in Canberra for SANE Australia's guide to electoral offices and delivered talks to researchers and biochemists at the Mental Health Research Institute, alongside weekly lectures to high school students on art and mental health.^[16] His engagements extend to consumer advocacy groups at facilities like Forensicare Psychiatric Hospital in Fairfield and North West Area Mental Health in Coburg, where he shared insights on psychosis prevention and family support.^[16]

Media appearances include interviews on ABC Radio National's *Life Matters* program discussing art and psychosis, SBS Television's *The Drug Debate*, and various regional ABC stations, alongside television spots on *Good Morning Australia* and *The Today Show* tied to his book launches and exhibitions.^[16] These platforms have amplified his critiques of psychiatric systems and promotion of creative recovery methods.^[16]

Critiques of Mental Health Systems

McLean has argued that psychiatric diagnoses, including his own of schizophrenia, lack validity and serve primarily to pathologize non-conforming experiences rather than address underlying human realities. In his 2019 submission to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, he described schizophrenia as a "myth" and recounted receiving multiple conflicting labels such as paranoid schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, schizoaffective disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, PTSD, dissociative states, and panic disorder, without any professional acknowledgment of his spiritual or esoteric insights.^[4] He contended that these diagnoses ignored patients' strengths, focusing instead on deficits, which he observed during his time as a Consumer Consultant in a psychiatric ward.^[4]

Critiquing treatment protocols, McLean portrayed mental health professionals as exploitative, prioritizing their own intellectual or financial interests over genuine

patient support, likening sessions to "storytelling narrative pornography." He highlighted the system's failure to assist with medication withdrawal; at age 44, he sought help from a psychologist to discontinue antipsychotics but received none, despite experiencing severe side effects including weight gain, fatigue, tremors, sexual dysfunction, and sleep apnea.^[4] McLean opposed the overreliance on pharmaceuticals, arguing they rendered patients "manageable" rather than healed, and cited an instance where a doctor prescribed a "lethal dose of opioids" after he expressed suicidal ideation, followed by no further intervention.^[4]

On involuntary commitments, McLean detailed cases of prolonged institutionalization due to inadequate community alternatives, such as a woman with dual disabilities confined to an inpatient unit for nearly two years under a Community Treatment Order requiring daily reporting and medication compliance, enforced by police if defied.^[4] He viewed such measures as emblematic of broader systemic failures, including under-resourcing, bureaucratic obstacles, and profit motives influenced by pharmaceutical companies, which disadvantaged those without financial means—"if you got no cash, you get no help."^[4]

McLean advocated for recovery models emphasizing personal agency over professional dependency, asserting that "psychology or psychiatry does not save you: ultimately you do," as evidenced by his own achievements like authoring the 2003 memoir *Recovered, Not Cured: A Journey Through Schizophrenia*, which won the SANE Book of the Year award in 2004, traveling internationally, and pursuing advanced degrees despite his diagnoses.^[4]^[1] He recommended educating medical staff to reduce stigma, compensating peer workers based on experiential value rather than tokenism, and reallocating societal funds—such as from military expenditures—to mental health services, while addressing root causes like economic isolation and inequality.^[4] These views stem from his lived experiences, including childhood sexual abuse, familial homophobia, job loss after publicizing his "descent into madness," and a suicide attempt amid professional

Academic and Research Activities

PhD Studies and Ethical Focus

McLean completed a Doctor of Philosophy at Victoria University in Melbourne, Australia, in 2020. His thesis, titled *A Splice of My Life*, employed an arts-based, practice-led, and qualitative theoretical approach to investigate the ethical implications of technological advancement on human identity.^[17] The work centered on amplifying young people's perspectives on what constitutes humanity in the present and future, analyzed through three interconnected technological frameworks: artificial intelligence (AI), emerging superintelligence, and posthumanism.^[17]

The research methodology integrated A/r/tography, arts-based research, and narrative inquiry—collectively termed "Living inquiry"—to bridge generational, temporal, and existential divides. This involved extrapolating ethical viewpoints from recorded interviews with young participants and the author's own retrospective analysis of personal art and memories, which revealed unforeseen creative artifacts akin to the unpredictability of a technological singularity's "event horizon."^[17] Posthumanism was defined as the potential transformation, transcendence, or elimination of humanity via technology or evolution, encompassing transhumanist enhancements to human capabilities, lifespans, and biology through means such as eugenics, gene modification, and the design of sentient entities.^[17]

Ethical concerns emphasized in the thesis included the moral dimensions of superintelligent AI potentially shaping posthuman qualities, exponential technological acceleration leading to interdimensional coexistence beyond biological limits, and human or posthuman survival amid global catastrophic risks

within the Anthropocene era.^[17] The study advocated compassion for nature and the living world, contrasting past analog human experiences with digitized futures, while questioning the ethical integrity of transcending traditional humanity in an era of quantum superintelligences.^[17] McLean's prior master's research on phi, spirit, and society informed this ethical lens, extending his exploration of human essence into speculative posthuman contexts.^[5]

Broader Intellectual Contributions

McLean's Master's exegesis, *The Universal Embrace: Considering Phi, Spirit & Society* (2015), advances an interdisciplinary framework integrating the golden ratio (phi), spiritual metaphysics, and societal ethics through arts-based research methodologies like A/r/tography.^[18] He posits phi not merely as a mathematical constant but as a resonant template embodying harmony amid chaos, structuring human experience from natural patterns (e.g., Fibonacci sequences in pine cones) to relational dynamics, thereby offering a philosophical lens for reconciling order and discord without reducing life to deterministic equations.^[5] This conceptualization extends to ethical implications, echoing Socratic views that mathematics informs moral reasoning, by framing phi as a basis for balanced decision-making in personal and collective contexts.^[5]

In exploring spirit, McLean draws on Eastern philosophies (e.g., Buddhist mantras like "Om Ma Ni Pad Me Hum") and Western thinkers such as Carl Jung to argue for spirit as an enduring energy bridging physical impermanence and universal interconnectedness, distinct from religious dogma.^[5] He proposes a "God-Self" ontology, inspired by artist Alex Grey, where individuals actively participate in cosmic resonance rather than passively endure it, fostering self-actualization through creative acts like interactive digital artworks that simulate relational embraces.^[5] This spiritual framework interlinks with societal critique, particularly on queer identity, by challenging heteronormative stigmas via celebratory representations of same-sex love, advocating for cultural acceptance as a precondition for reducing psycho-spiritual fragmentation.^[5] McLean employs

rhizomatic relations—non-linear connections among art, narrative, and invention—to demonstrate how personal expressions can catalyze broader societal dialogue on diversity and empathy.^[5]

His PhD research extends these ideas into posthuman ethics, examining the implications of technological singularity and transhumanism for human essence through a self-reflexive, experiential methodology.^[19] McLean questions the erosion of autonomy in machine-augmented futures, prioritizing esoteric dimensions of humanity—such as intuitive resonance and ethical vulnerability—over purely rational or biotechnological paradigms.^[19] By validating youth concerns on these fronts via lived narrative and creative artifacts, he contributes to bioethics discourse, critiquing eugenics-like manipulations while upholding principles of kindness and relational trinity (self, others, universe) as safeguards for authentic human flourishing.^[19] These efforts, grounded in arts practice-based research, underscore McLean's push against siloed disciplines, favoring holistic models that privilege empirical creativity and causal interconnections in addressing existential challenges.^[20]

Controversies and Recent Developments

Whistleblower Claims and Disputes

In 2019, Richard McLean submitted evidence to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, where he described serving as a paid consumer consultant on a psychiatric ward at Werribee Mercy Hospital while being a mental health service user himself.^[4] In this capacity, he alleged witnessing and experiencing unethical practices, including improper patient releases, systemic oppression, and failures in care protocols that contributed to broader injustices within Victoria's mental health framework.^[4] These disclosures positioned him as a critic of institutional shortcomings, drawing on first-hand observations from

2010s inpatient and consultative roles.

McLean further claims to have lodged public interest disclosures (PIDs) under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013 (Cth) targeting the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and Department of Social Services (DSS). An authorised DSS officer contacted him in relation to potential PIDs conveyed via emails alleging misconduct, including corruption and inadequate safeguards for vulnerable participants.^[21] He asserts these revelations exposed high-level governmental irregularities, such as manipulated funding and ethical breaches in disability support, echoing his earlier mental health critiques.

Post-disclosure, McLean alleges retaliation by state actors, including harassment, financial deprivation through denied benefits and employment sabotage, and identity erasure (e.g., forced alias use as "Barran Dodger").^[22] He maintains entitlement to PID protections against reprisal, yet reports systemic betrayal, leading to alleged severe personal and financial hardship and reliance on NDIS coaching amid unresolved Federal Court mentions of his cases.^[23]

These claims face disputes from institutional silence and absence of upheld investigations; DSS engagements did not result in substantiated reforms or protections, per McLean's accounts, while no independent probes or convictions validate the corruption allegations.^[21] Self-published narratives dominate evidence, lacking third-party corroboration beyond Royal Commission acceptance of his input, raising questions of verifiability amid his advocacy history. McLean disputes official narratives by framing responses as cover-ups, but empirical support remains confined to his testimonies without peer-reviewed or governmental endorsements.

NDIS Coaching and Current Projects

McLean serves as a registered NDIS provider offering therapeutic supports through arts-life coaching, primarily assisting marginalized individuals with disabilities in Footscray and surrounding areas of western Melbourne, Victoria.^[15]

His services emphasize art-based recovery and life coaching, drawing from his personal experiences in mental health and artistic practice, though self-reported details from social media profiles warrant caution due to potential promotional bias.^[24]

As of recent listings, McLean operates under NDIS registration for capacity-building supports, focusing on creative therapeutic interventions to foster independence and skill development for participants facing psychosocial disabilities or social isolation.^[25] Client reviews and service descriptions highlight his approach to integrating visual arts, illustration, and personal advocacy into coaching sessions, though independent verification of outcomes remains limited in public records.^[26]

Current projects include ongoing NDIS-funded coaching initiatives alongside his broader artistic and research endeavors, such as developing ethical frameworks for human identity in technological contexts, which indirectly inform his therapeutic work.^[27] McLean has publicly positioned these efforts as part of a commitment to corruption-free disability services, as stated in his 2023-2024 whistleblower-related testimonials, though these claims intersect with separate disputes and lack peer-reviewed substantiation.^[28]

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