

Origins of Our Approach

In this blog, you will learn about the origins of the *Creative Arts and Culture Focusing* flagship program, Receptive-Expressive Arts Focusing (REAF).

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<https://expressiveartsfocusing.com/creative-compassion/blog>

A Journey of Refuge - From Exhibits to Lighthouse of Peace and Calm

I enter the exhibition room shortly before the museum closes. It features small pastels by the German artist Adolf Hölzel with abstract color compositions. The pastels are simple yet masterful. I think, 'Here is someone who has perfected his art.' Looking at these pastels evokes a sense of inner relief. After viewing the entire exhibition, I return to the room where the pastels are displayed. I feel like I need to be back in the room where they are displayed. Again, I feel a bodily relief. I hear my own sigh, and something inside feels more spacious

Days later, the pastel compositions are still alive inside me. I ask myself: 'Why is this memory so vivid?' My body is providing information—something about the pastels was soothing and comforting. Something in the exhibition room gave me what I miss in life. What is this something about? I realize that there was more than just pastels on the wall. I sit down and listen to my body, visualizing the exhibition room again and again, feeling into it.

An inner rhythm emerges as a feeling. Then, it shifts to a movement. I feel as if I have found a movement rhythm that matches my inner Felt Sense. This rhythm is connected with verbalization. I feel a word is coming, but it's not in my native language. I instinctively know the first letter of the word. It starts with a capital 'S'. I try different words beginning with 'S'. No English word matches. I realize that the match must come primarily from the body, not my brain. The body holds a knowing. Then, a very strange and complicated word shows up: 'Serenity'. I had never heard this word before. It has never been part of my English vocabulary, yet I recognize its rhythm. How come? There is a deep shift inside. There is something good around this word, which has been connected with this artwork from the 1920s and 1930s. It was not meant to be grasped at first sight.

This verbal symbolization has now occurred, opening up to something further. It comes from an embodied rhythm. The rhythm of the word 'Se-re-ni-ty' makes me think of something spiritual, like the word 'Trinity'. I am surprised looking up the dictionary. Serenity is defined as the quality of being peaceful and calm. Is that all? So simple? One insight from Prof. Eugene T. Gendlin, the founder of Focusing, is this: 'Life is thicker than theory'. There must be more about the word 'serenity' than a dictionary can convey, I tell myself.

I decide to recapture Adolf Hölzel's pastel compositions through artistic practice. I feel that I must experiment with them to truly understand them. Reproducing them might transform them into new forms. Will those new forms embark a More of...?

I know from experience: any form that comes from the body sense conveys meaning in a new way. A 'More of' comes from a form that matches the Felt Sense. I feel as if I have found something meaningful to work on in the long term. A part of me has always felt lost in the world, seeking belonging. Engaging with Hölzel's pastels in an artistic way seems like a good way to explore this part with empathy and curiosity.



Image Detail © Freda Blob

Hölzel's pastel compositions illuminate peace and calm amidst disastrous times. They hold a 'More of' and are like a lighthouse – an art refuge for building compassion, resilience, and action for good.

