

Receptive-Expressive Arts Focusing © Freda Blob

Receptive-Expressive Arts Focusing (REAF) is the primary program within the Focusing-Oriented Creative Arts Engagement and Therapy (FOCEAT) approach. It is a standalone program and an integral part of Focusing-Oriented Therapy (FOT), as practiced at the FOCUSZART Focusing Studio & School.

REAF uses Felt Sense-Based Studio Art and fine art references from museum collections and other global sources to solve problems and improve well-being. REAF's toolsets stem from the creative arts therapies and the mind-body approach of Focusing.

Receptive-Expressive Arts Focusing REAF follows the ethics of the person-centered and experiential approach. This means that your needs are at the center of everything your therapist or facilitator does.

To start a REAF session or workshop, please bring artwork from museums or other cultural institutions that you like to the studio. These pieces can be physical or virtual. You can use flyers or photos taken during visits as visual references. Alternatively, you can access museum art on your smartphone or select art from books, catalogs, or postcards in the studio, or from your therapist's digital devices.

You will alternate between receptive activities, such as observing the artwork through Slow-Looking, and expressive activities, such as drawing, writing, and movement. This combination allows you to develop a deeper, more personal connection to art and to yourself.

REAF is a trauma-informed approach. You do not have to verbalize any traumatic experiences. Additionally, you are not required to undergo classical Focusing processing, which may evoke overwhelming imagery. Also, you are not required to express yourself artistically firsthand. Moreover, the chosen museum artwork serves as a holding container for anything bothering you.

Once you are ready, you can start with the reference material you brought to the studio, or you can use other art references you find there. You can experiment with sharing your insights on your chosen references, or you can transition to creating your own artwork based on your art sense (aesthetic-oriented) or felt sense (body-oriented).

You can reflect on your artwork by writing about your creative process or engaging in a personal dialogue with your art. If you feel inspired, express your artwork through movement or dance, or explore its meaning through sound.

Because the program encourages you to bring your interpretations of art from museums and other sources to the studio from the start, it reduces the hierarchical power dynamics typically found in traditional psychotherapy

REAF History

The Receptive-Expressive Arts Focusing (REAF) program was developed from a person-centered and experiential standpoint. Starting as Expressive Arts Focusing (EXAF), the program evolved over four years to become REAF.

Receptive-Expressive Arts Focusing (REAF) is based on European Focusing and the receptive art therapy approach of [Prof. Hilarion Petzold](#). Petzold is a renowned psychotherapist and co-founder of the Fritz Perls Institute. Petzold's approach, which originated in the 1960s, combines receptive aesthetic engagement with intermodal art activities. Encompassing all forms and media of the creative arts therapies, it emphasizes art as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or total work of art.

We apply the *Gesamtkunstwerk* concept to contemporary receptive art therapy, considering receptive and expressive arts engagement as part of a creative continuum.

REAF's Focusing has its origins in the innovative Focusing training programs developed by European Focusing pioneers [Christiane Geiser](#), [Hejo Feuerstein](#), and the late [Ernst Juchli](#). They were and are renowned person-centered and experiential psychotherapists, TIFI Certifying Coordinators and the co-founders of the German-Swiss Focusing Network (FN) and the German Focusing Association (DFG), respectively. Their work had a lasting influence on the FOCUSZART Focusing style.

Since 1981, Ernst Juchli (FN) has taught cyclic processing in intermodal Focusing. His wife Christiane Geiser (FN) introduced us to the concept of structure-boundness and the use of museum art representatives in Focusing in 2003. In 2014, we learned about guided Focusing exercises related to imaginative art-making and imaginative museum visits from Hejo Feuerstein (DFG).

Additionally, the work of [René Maas](#), a renowned Dutch PCE psychotherapist and Certifying Coordinator, is incorporated into the REAF program. In 1997, he introduced us to his trauma-informed "Clearing a Space" method, which uses physical distancing to address the issue at hand. His specific, person-centered approach to designing intermodal Focusing sessions also influenced our Focusing style, shaping it toward equal-status interaction.

We applied the teachings of these European Focusing pioneers ever since.