

Blog: Origins of REAF

In this blog post, you will learn about the origins of the Focusing-Oriented Creative Arts Engagement and Therapy (FOCAET) flagship program, Receptive-Expressive Arts Focusing (REAF). It will teach you how the intersection of museum art and Focusing Felt Sense can touch one's deepest sense of spirituality.

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

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'. This word 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.

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 and resilience.



Years later, I come across a Rumi poem that a friend had posted on Facebook over a decade ago. Though I didn't understand all the words, the rhythm of the poem, which included the word "serenity," resonated with me when I encountered it. As I looked at Hölzel's art, my body remembered the rhythm it had felt back then.

*"Among the hills, when you sit in the cool shade of the white poplars,
sharing the peace and serenity of distant fields and meadows -
then let your heart say in silence, "God rests in reason."
And when the storm comes, and the mighty wind shakes the forest,
and thunder and lightning proclaim the majesty of the sky,
- then let your heart say in awe, "God moves in passion."*

(Kahlil Gibrán, [The Prophet](#))