

Focusing-Oriented Museum Arts Therapy (FOMAT) © Freda Blob

Focusing-Oriented Museum Arts Therapy (FOMAT) promotes stress reduction, well-being, and resilience. It invites underserved populations who typically do not visit museums to experience them as places of peace and belonging. At the start of a FOMAT workshop, which has a specific theme or focuses on a particular artist, participants are given ample time to acclimate to their surroundings. This acclimation period includes refreshments. Workshops are held at times when the museum has low visitor frequency.

Focusing-Oriented Museum Art Therapy makes therapeutic use of the museum environment. Just as the living body responds differently depending on its surroundings, the therapeutic process varies from gallery to gallery. Nevertheless, some structural elements of FOMAT remain consistent across galleries.

FOMAT uses Focusing, Receptive Art Therapy and creative and expressive arts toolsets to help the various target groups get the most out of their engagement with museum art. FOMAT adheres to the ethics of the Person-Centered and Experiential Approach. This means that the needs of each person in the group are at the center of everything the museum's art therapist does.

Participants will alternate between receptive activities, such as observing art in a museum through Slow Looking, and expressive activities, such as drawing, writing, and moving. This combination enables participants to develop a deeper, more personal connection to art and to themselves.

Participants are not required to verbalize any feelings or emotional states that may arise or be present. They are also not required to undergo Focusing's six-step processing. Nor are they required to express themselves artistically. Instead, they are invited to take photos of artwork in the museum that speaks to them. Paying attention to a piece of art causes subtle changes in their environmental Felt Sense.

If the expressive part of the workshop takes place in the gallery in front of an exhibit, participants can choose to simply contribute by being present with the group instead of actively following the prompts of the art therapist. If the museum provides a studio, garden, or suitable cafe, participants can transition from implicit to explicit meaning-making by creating artwork based on their aesthetic or body-oriented Felt Sense. Participants may reflect on a piece of artwork by discussing or writing about it. They can also create visual responses to the artwork using materials provided by the art therapist or express their feelings through movement and sound. Active engagement is not possible for everyone; simply being part of the group and contributing to a sense of "we" is enough, and it is more than welcome. Sharing art responses is part of the therapeutic process. Those unable to respond artistically to the chosen museum piece can participate by sharing the photos they took.

All participants are invited to stay in touch with the art therapist for further exchange. As a form of group therapy, FOMAT reduces the hierarchical power dynamics typically found in traditional psychotherapy and fosters community building.