

EcoSomatic Expression: Remembering and Renewing our Nature

Retreats with Jamie McHugh, MSMT (USA)

EcoSomatic Expression is an experiential, hands-on practice for cultivating an embodied relationship with the more-than-human world to remember and renew our nature.

Created by Jamie McHugh, EcoSomatic Expression has been shared with various groups in the landscapes of North America and Europe over the past 35 years. Its applications are as diverse as the people who bring it into their lives and work, including performance, creative writing, visual art, environmental education and ecopsychology.

EcoSomatic Expression begins with getting to know our bodies from the inside out. Somatic practices are the doorway into the mind of sensate experience. After this change of orientation, the process continues by combining **somatic actions** (inward facing) with **relational actions** (outward facing).

Somatic actions are the basis of what is popularly referred to these days as nervous system regulation. Yet there is so much more at play here than just the nervous system – it is the full constellation of our inner ecology. This diverse ecosystem is accessed through the five somatic technologies: breath, vocalization, contact, movement and stillness.

Each technology offers a different flavor of bodily focus and feedback. Through exploration and repetition, our inner sense perceptions become more available, creating conditions in which we may slow down, settle, and become more receptive.

As we enact different expressions of breath, self-contact, movement and stillness, our capacity to sense ourselves becomes more nuanced. And as perception within deepens, outer perception can expand.

Our innate sensitivity can breathe a sigh of relief, come out of hiding, and revel in amplified sense impressions. And with this renewed sensitivity, the living presence of the natural world can more easily come into the foreground as a subject of contemplation and interaction in its own right.

Relational actions offer five different ways of engaging with the natural world: witnessing, contacting, mirroring, responding and resting. We may simply witness what is before us, make physical contact, mirror its movement or form, allow a personal response to emerge, or rest in relationship. Through each of these actions, we offer attention to the world outside our own skin while remaining anchored in the felt experience within.

EcoSomatic Expression is a spiral process: receiving the natural world, feeling what is evoked, responding in turn – and then receiving anew. We enter into these relationships without a

predetermined outcome and in a spirit of discovery. There is no “get” to get. We discover what is here through the doing, rather than deciding beforehand what we are supposed to find.

This open-ended experience allows the present moment to provide the next step, moment by moment. This is similar to the free-form play of young children or the improvisational synergy of musicians creating together. It is all in the play!

In these residential retreats, we gift ourselves with time. A time to immerse ourselves in the living experience of our bodies; to meet the natural world with all our senses; and to remember, explore and reveal more of who we are and what we can be. Tree, sky, rock and water become partners in discovering what can be sensed, embodied and expressed.

Each day begins with settling and exploring one’s inner landscape with the five somatic technologies. (Video overview of the technologies [here](#)) From there, the process moves into relationship with the outer landscape with the five relational actions.

The blending of somatic practices with relational activities can open into a creative flow, giving rise to spontaneous dances, intuitive songs, and silent contemplations. These are all ways to connect more deeply with one’s interior and the larger body of the Earth. Reflecting through spontaneous writing and speaking supports emergent meaning, and completes the process.

The invitation is ultimately simple: to slow down enough to feel ourselves, become receptive enough to encounter the living world afresh, and playful enough to discover what arises in relationship. Through this ongoing exchange of receiving and responding, we may remember something easily obscured in everyday life. Nature is not somewhere we go. Nature is what we are.

Contact Jamie [here](#) for more information about scheduled retreats, or if you are interested in organizing a retreat.