

## Poetry of Symbols

How do we experience the world? Which symbols do we use to represent it? Sometimes it takes just a few lines or areas of color to evoke visual associations. This is especially the case with picture books that deliberately avoid a “realistic” representation of the world and instead experiment with characters, numerals, and abstract forms.

How is meaning generated using abstract forms? To get an idea of the variety of possibilities, take, for instance, the square: In the “digital” zoo (*mon petit zoo numérique*), an extremely small number of squares—enlarged pixels—serves to represent the animals. The squares in *Gucken* [Peek], a book for children, can be read in two different ways: on the one hand as an abstract pictorial game of forms and colors, and on the other—inspired by Eugen Gomringer’s texts—as stories acted out by characters. Philosophical ideas can also be graphically expressed using abstract forms. Warja Lavater’s *Ergo* uses abstract areas of color and graphic symbols whose specific shapes and colors evoke emotional associations: a pictorial exploration of René Descartes’ famous dictum “cogito ergo sum”—I think therefore I am.

An aesthetic engagement with characters opens up a broad field of possibilities. As may be seen from alphabet books, both letters and typographic symbols can be understood as visual events to be staged on paper—not only introducing children to their letters but, through their variety, also stimulating and nurturing creative thinking.

The interplay between abstraction and figuration, between geometry and emotionality, opens up lyrical spaces of the imagination in which the poetry of symbols can flourish.