WORDS ABANDONED: PICTOGRAMS AND IDEOGRAPHMS IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN VISUAL POETRY

Pictograms were originated within the framework of the pre-alphabetic system of writing, and the term itself belongs to a mnemonic or semasiographic phase of writing in which the picture or the sketch conveys a direct likeness of idea. Having evolved directly from picture-writing, pictographic writing differs from its predecessor by the shift of emphasis from the picture itself to the sign, which represents the object imaged by the pictogram. Scholars typically consider pictography as the early stage of true writing, directly relating it to the development of phonetic scripts. In the process of their further evolution, pictograms turned into phonograms when "the phonetic value of the sign became independent of the original referent of the sign (and eventually of the external shape) and could be combined productively in a conventional system to intercommunicate."

Pictographic writing is typically based on the premise that there is "no connection or at least only a loosely recognized implied one, between the spoken word, the name used in the native vernacular to designate the object, and the picture representing the thing referred to." Another principle of non-phonetic writing, ideographic writing, is very close to the previously described system since an ideogram "implies a sign which conveys a meaning which is either purely conventional or only indirectly related to a pictographic prototype." Typically, an ideogram represents a concept, an idea, or thing rather than a word or phrase. In most ideographic systems, "the originally plain representations lose their pictorial features by degrees" due to the

1. In contrast to the phonographic writing (expressing speech) semasiographic writing is defined as "expressing meanings and notions loosely connected with speech." I. J. Gelb, A Study of Writing (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 11.
necessity to write signs in a quick and easy manner. Since "the meaning is conveyed independently of the spoken word," both systems of non-alphabetic writing represent "a broad sphere of symbolic expressions, embracing message-sticks, totemic and magical designs, and the like." For this particular reason the concept of pictographic and ideographic writing was widely used in rebuses and puzzle poems, quite popular in European Renaissance and Baroque literature. Even in seventeen-century Russian literature, which is often referred to as "culturally alien" to the shared European experience, a similar tendency can be traced in the poetic legacy of Simeon Polotskii. However, it is worth mentioning that this Moscow court poet and a tutor to the children of Tsar Aleksei, was introduced to European poetic traditions during his studies at the Kyivan Colleguim, and probably, the Jesuit College in Vilna.

Not all puzzle poems are visual, since many of them lose their visual character upon solving. However, the creators of puzzle poems demonstrate the same intention to lure the reader into the engaging play of working through the poem's apparent incomprehensibility, as do many of those contemporary visualists who resort to pictographic or ideographic writing in their experiments using words, signs and images. It should be noted that many pieces of semasiographic writing demonstrate an apparent proximity to graphic art, making them aesthetically pleasing and appealing to the public.

Since non-alphabetic writing by itself, or in combination with the alphabetic one, both convey the message, the problem of its decoding remains an important issue, whether for the texts created in the pre-alphabetic time or in experimental works by contemporary visualists. The pictogram "recalls the thing itself to the mind, not the name of the thing, unless involuntarily called up by the reader." Therefore, it is up to the reader to ascribe meaning to a picture. The evolution of pictographic writing "among people of all races... seems to have progressed along practically identical lines of growth," although principles of pictography were not uniform for different systems of semasiographic writing. As Wayne Senner suggests, "each system evolved unique characteristics within distinct graphic and semantic features." Therefore, the process of message decoding required a series of mental experiences.

11. Ibid., p. 49.