

EGS, Towards an Imperfect Picture

by Carlo McCormick

Poets may rhapsodize, capitalists will capitalize, and the rest of us must fantasize, but the paradigm of beauty as an absolute is mostly uncertain, contentious and relative. We may recognize it when we see it, but we only know it when we feel it. EGS, a visual artist from a distant periphery of the cultural hive, has maybe a different idea of beauty than what is typically idealized. Let's not attribute this to his being Finnish, though perhaps all places have their own aesthetic sensibilities, but it's possible that some critical distance from where the main production of desire takes place might allow a different, more idiosyncratic, notion of beauty. Certainly, there are moments in EGS' work where something beautiful happens, events that feel almost accidental, not so much determined as allowed, far from the epitome of perfection, rather in fact even more enchanting for their imperfections.

Flaws, irregularities, deviations and disturbances abound in EGS' art, casual as if by chance, but deliberate like an obstinacy, an unwillingness to succumb to conformity. Hard to say what is normal these days - it would probably be something of a statistical average rather than a social hegemony as it once was - but there's something delightfully abnormal about the imagery and modes of representation EGS values.

That's what saves this art from being pretty; it is far too striking for such a banality. Even when EGS embraces that most suspect and derided form-as-function, the decorative, he offers the semblance of ornamentation with a subversive, mutant effect. What is inherently lovely becomes a bit disorienting, a seduction that puts us back on our heels.

Watercolors, glassware, even the most paintings on canvas, typically offer a degree of visual comfort, but I suspect the artist shuns the comfortable as he does permanence and perfection. EGS investigates these media thoroughly, instigating frailties and foibles into the language of beauty.

Wonderfully, the slippage from perfection is built into the mediums he chooses, from the unforgiving nature of watercolors, where it is impossible to correct your mistakes, or glassblowing's standards of craft where anything less than seamless faultlessness is a failure, to the root of EGS practice, graffiti, which is typically hurried, often interrupted and subject to myriad unpredictable factors, yet unmercifully public.

Whatever EGS makes is always a kind of improbability, a success that probably didn't go to plan. Perhaps he's flirting with failure, but more likely there's a level of attraction here that is far more committed to the potential of ruin than any mere flirtation.

EGS wholly appreciates most defects as the defining idiosyncrasies of humanity and the natural world. He allows the possibility of imperfection because he is invested in the process rather than beholden to the end result. That kind of determined indetermination seems as much a part of his character as it is of his philosophy and aesthetics. He's interested in rules, but he likes breaking them too.

He never loses sight of the overall outline - especially when it comes to spelling out E-G-S as he does in every work - but it's how he somehow colors outside the lines, the way he brings a certain looseness to the rigor, where we feel the joy. He adheres to just enough that we can recognize the hand of an accomplished artist, but all that finesse discloses an unmistakable gesture of disobedience. His fine art of straying off the expected path, however, isn't a matter of being contrary, it's simply a case of being curious.

Graffiti, and EGS remains a graffiti writer in everything he makes, is a trick of identity conceived in a world where one's sense of self is continuously undermined and diminished. The creation of a new name, in this case EGS, is the adoption of a persona embodied and emboldened in the tag, defiant in its visibility, secret in its habits, and built like an enigma, where its very anonymity- like an avenger's mask- is intrinsic to its power.

As a writer EGS distinguished himself as an innovator more than a marauder, never so much invading public space as infecting it with anomalies, occupying the margins like pockets of disturbance or decay, ruptures erupting along the fault lines of order. Reimagined in watercolors, paintings and glass sculptures, the anatomy of the name becomes amorphous, the unstable chimera of a constant shapeshifter.

And that instability is so exciting, so precarious. EGS is an irrational composite, letters that do not come together easily and do so here for no apparent meaning beyond their internal conjunction. Their coherence is slapdash and improvisational, like a temporary lean-to threatening to collapse and fall apart, yet always eminently secure of itself. Everything coheres, but it is permeable and provisional. EGS offers seemingly endless alternatives, eschewing certainty in favor of the hypothetical, resisting stability in an ever-shifting flow of implied movement and sustained ambiguity. Each constellation of letters, in whatever material he composes them in, stand vertiginous, asymmetrical, dizzying and distracting, an ambition dissolved in a blur. Written in the wind, conveyed as an aside, EGS is the essence of motion conjured in the dynamics of liquidity.

The vanity of human mark-making, EGS seems to be telling us, is a folly too easily washed away; the tangibility of objects destabilized by their rendering and recording in molten-glass, water-based colors, and, when outdoors, the unforgiving degradations of time.

There's nothing morbid about the suggestion of mortality that clings to EGS' art like a superstitious intuition - it's all smiles, with a wink. What happens in his pictures and objects is like tiny miracles, where something magical happens quite unexpectedly. The presence of this grace is transformative precisely because it is not ever-lasting but entirely provisional. His is a fragile beauty all the more alluring for its frangible and fleeting presence.

Contemplative though his art may be in its dreamy way, there is an up-tempo to his creative process that beats at a faster pace. Working in mediums like glass and watercolor, that demand a certain speed of execution, and dedicating much of his painting practice to the outdoors and out of bounds where circumstances don't exactly encourage the artist to dawdle, what we get in the final products is a sense of acceleration slowed down, caught in a blink yet etched into our retinas. As if caught in motion, EGS' visual language resists resolution and hovers perpetually near completion, too impatient with absolutes, rather a bit raw than perfectly refined. This intemperate haste suggests a sort of urgency and agility that lightens and leavens the experience of his art making it seems both effervescent and evanescent.

Indeterminacy is a curious position for any artist to take. EGS occupies it as a temporal zone of intermediacy. The watercolors, so exquisite in their effects, are but sketches, hand racing, mind reeling, eyes popping. And his paintings have a delirious habit of stopping short of consummation or conclusion, leaving patches bare to expose the raw canvas, the best things left unsaid or unfinished. In glass he can capture this in-process mutability in situ, torn from the miasma of the creation like gestational life forms from the womb, born of spontaneity and manifested as surprises. He has likened meeting his glass creations when they first come out of the cooling oven to when he sees one of his graffiti works in the daylight after having painted it at night. The best laid plans dance with chance, the optimal outcome is the unexpected.

Graffiti, as much EGS' native language as Finnish is his mother tongue, is about letterforms-what they spell, their style and what they say. EGS makes graffiti that is beyond words, that touch the sublime and reside in the unspeakable. As such his work is a bit indescribable, and I imagine I'm not the first writer who has felt somewhat at a loss for words when talking about his art. Perpetually off-balance, bound to tradition insofar as it can disregard its orthodoxies, and built of impossible contradictions, the majesty of EGS' constructions is that they sustain themselves against the odds, reflecting the disorder, degeneration and instability of the world into which they are actualized.

Because EGS' art doesn't stay still, refuses to define itself, and thrives in the liminal, it's best not to try to pin it down but rather simply follow it like some torrid body of water that presents a solidity of surface out of undercurrents that can sweep us away. I heard in fact that the artist's studio is on an island apart from his home, that he takes a boat there every day to work, but in the winter, when the water is frozen, he can walk over the ice to get there. That's not unlike the feeling one gets navigating his art, it is able to cross over boundaries that inhibit others, isn't predetermined to any single path, and is deftly surefooted, but getting there remains an act of faith, a certainty that things will hold up that buoys the journey as it whispers back that nothing is forever.

An exhibition conceived specially for SPAZIO21, *EGS Invisible Identity*, performs its migratory meaning in its curatorial decisions, with half the work created in Finland and half the work made in Italy. This is not only true of the glasswork, some of which were done in Finnish hot shop, or glass studio, where he has been working for the past decade, and the rest made in the legendary Murano glass foundry of Seguso Vetri d'Arte, near Venice, but also the paintings and watercolors included in the show. Here we see how EGS plies the different techniques and capabilities of each glass art tradition towards his own ends, as well as in the pictures get some measure of the changing landscape he occupies, the quality of light and range of color variable by place. Wherever it is made or wherever it appears, EGS is a transient apparition, a geography of the in-between charted in the geometry of becoming.

EGS (Helsinki, Finland, 1974)

He began painting at a very young age. An autodidact, he was driven by the urge to express his creativity in unauthorized public spaces—an approach he has never abandoned. This practice gave rise to his stage name, EGS: three letters—meaningless in themselves—that have evolved into both a message and the foundation of his art. EGS has developed a visual language, a personal alphabet that tells stories and incorporates cultural, historical, and popular references—particularly themes such as identity, place, and movement—through abstract forms.

He completed his higher education in Helsinki and graduated in 2000 with honors in Graphic Design from the University of Arts in London, where he engaged with an international environment and experienced the creative vibrancy of one of the most transgressive cities in the world.

After earning his BA in Arts, he dedicated himself to studio work, developing a semantic system capable of translating the eclecticism of his public space productions onto paper and canvas. Starting in 2006, he began participating in group exhibitions across major European capitals, and from 2009 onward, he has been featured in numerous solo shows.

Among the various art forms, he also explores sculpture, particularly the creation of three-dimensional glass works. This experience developed almost by chance starting in 2015, when a collective of young artisans acquired the Lasismi glass factory to revive a Finnish tradition of glass design. They invited him among emerging artists to develop a collection together.

Since then, EGS has established himself as one of the leading artists in this medium. Glass, as a material and production process, combines physicality and spontaneity in a way that closely resembles graffiti art, where unpredictability plays a crucial role and unforeseen outcomes often lead to the most engaging results.

Five years later, in 2020, he was invited to realize his first retrospective at the Finnish Glass Museum, a show that highlighted his innovative use of molten glass for sculptural forms.

In recent years, EGS has exhibited in prestigious venues such as the Helsinki Kunsthalle and participated in major international art events, including his city's Biennale, for which he also curated the visual identity in 2025. He has also completed numerous public commissions and his works have been acquired by leading foundations and private collections across the Nordic countries.

His pieces are part of public collections such as the Finnish National Gallery, Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Serlachius Museum. His work has been featured in significant publications, including *Abstract Vandalism* (Unruly Publishing, 2015), the monograph *EGS*.

Writing My Diary (Finnish Art Society, 2018), and the exhibition catalog *Republic of EGS. Travel Guide*, published by the Didrichsen Museum (2024).

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