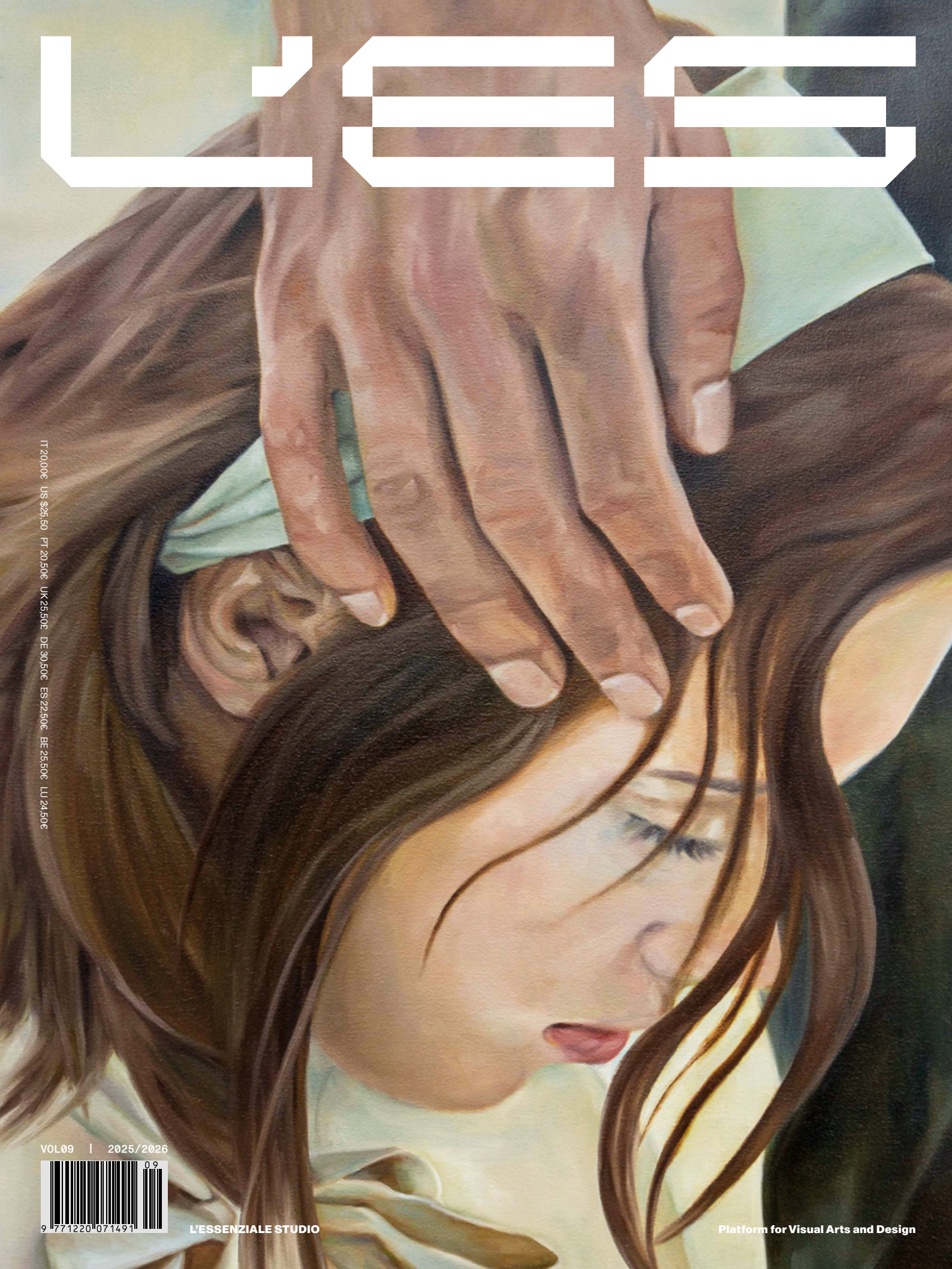


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EGS IN CONVERSATION WITH CARLO MCCORMICK

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

It is an interesting, and perhaps quite strange, time to be making fragile things. We live in a moment of great frailty—of political, ecological, economic, and social uncertainty, even distress. Crawling out from the rubble of a globalism that once seemed so promising, this age of unmaking seems more attuned to authority, status, and power than to the doubts, instabilities, and nuances that EGS peddles in his migratory practice.

Most widely known as a graffiti writer who has consistently undermined the supremacy of letterforms and mark-making in his medium with elements of unpredictability, discretion, and degradation not readily associated with the swagger of vandalism, EGS has time and again attained remarkable levels of mastery—not as a means of control so much as an envelope or vessel to fill with the unruly energies of chaos.

Drawn to the long glass tradition of his native Finland—where craft, design, and innovation once defined it as a national industry—EGS set about translating his three-letter tag into a medium that, in most obvious ways, would seem antithetical to tagging itself: sculpting his name as a three-dimensional form, creating it in a precious material with all sorts of artisanal and refined associations, and elevating its commonness towards something far more contemplative.

But of course, that's all wrong. We profoundly misunderstand graffiti if we do not follow EGS's cultural intuition that there is a democracy of means and expression between graffiti and those modes of creativity that have been shunted off into the absurd classist margins of decorative or minor arts in the modern era. In each, he has tethered the quiet sense of hope in his art to the dictates of process, trespassing notions of genre, medium, property, and class along the way.

Entering into the rarified realm of glasswork at the same time as that entire industry and history is receding from our cultural landscape, EGS is going somewhere entirely new—familiar if half-forgotten—like the disused, neglected, and marginalized topographies he has ventured into as a kind of urban explorer and writer. His practice makes the abject appear priceless, and the monumental seem insubstantial, all wrapped up in an aesthetics of inversion, like some high-blend coupling of truth and beauty. His work has a grace and fearlessness that is rare these days—a spirit that has less to do with being clever than with being kind.

For his exhibition at Spazio C.21 in Reggio Emilia, EGS has supplemented his Finnish glass pieces with a new body of work made in Venice at the legendary Murano glassmakers of Seguso. He says he was able to do things there that he couldn't anywhere else. For us, this means that once again he is doing something no one else can (or would) do.

CARLO MCCORMICK: A wall is a very hard thing to hit; it promises permanence and impermeability. We do not think of glass in this way—it is fragile and transparent. To go from writing on walls to working with glass would seem to be materially incompatible, but perhaps there is a sense of the ephemeral to graffiti as to glass? How do you connect these two very different mediums in your mind?



Field Study in Distance, 2025. Watercolor on paper, 46 × 31 cm.
Ph. Alessandro Bonori.

EGS: Graffiti and glass both deal with contradictions — permanence and fragility, visibility and disappearance. My letters have always been unstable, blurred, in flux, and glass lets me capture that same instability in a lasting form. Both are ephemeral: graffiti can be gone overnight; glass can shatter in a second. They also share unpredictability: bad weather, guards, or weak paint can ruin a piece, just as glass can surprise you when it comes out of the cooling oven. Seeing it the next day feels like seeing a graffiti piece in daylight after painting it at night.



The Colour of Morning Air, 2025. Watercolor on paper, 42 × 29,5 cm. Ph. Alessandro Bonori.



Pebbles from Distant Shores, 2025. Watercolor on paper, 42 × 29,5 cm. Ph. Alessandro Bonori.

CM: Glassmaking in Finland goes back to the 17th century, rises to prominence in the 18th century, and is most recognized for the mid-20th-century designs, but it is perhaps not so well known to the public. Can you describe it to us as tradition and legacy, and why it has appealed to you now, in the 21st century?

CM: From the outside, if we think of Finnish glass we think of Alvar Aalto's Savoy Vase or Toikka's Birds. Your work seems to me more eccentric and unpredictable; how do you view what you are doing versus the classics?

CM: For this exhibition, you are taking the opportunity to work with the great glass artisans of Venice. What does that mean in terms of what you are able to do there, and how it may change your art from what you do in Finland?

CM: Artistic glassmaking has been in notable decline over the past few decades, many of the great practitioners aging out without new generations taking their place, and economic hardships shuttering some of the most important foundries. What does this mean to you as you enter the field?

CM: Often, within historic craft traditions such as glassblowing, ceramics, and woodcarving, an abiding sense of craft and tradition has stifled radical innovation. This creates a kind of creative friction and growth when more experimental or conceptual artists migrate into these crafts for their own purposes. What has been your experience trying to invent your own language within this long heritage?

CM: Because you are reproducing your tag EGS in glass, all your sculptures are essentially triptychs. How do you make these three-component forms relate to one another three-dimensionally, and what problems does that pose for you?

CM: Your art inherently rubs up against authority and identity. Of course, this is true for paintings in public spaces that were not exactly commissioned, as well as producing art under a different name, but you have a great style of breaking down the certainty of representation in blurs and blobs of biomorphic abstraction. You do a lot of art in private, obscure places where it is not typically seen, and you even invented a kind of dream republic, an alternate nation, for a recent museum show. What can we say about the slippery spaces around absolutes? How do these kinds of indeterminate zones appeal to you?

EGS: Finnish glass has a strong modernist legacy, especially mid-20th century, when form met function. Kaj Franck's philosophy that glass should be for everyday use—art and design for everyone, not just the elite—resonates with me. I see it like graffiti: democratic, accessible, outside class divisions. That history is both inspiring and intimidating, a tradition of clarity and elegance, but I'm more interested in breaking away from "perfect form." For me, glass is both ancient and futuristic, rooted in tradition but always open to reinvention.

EGS: Designers like Wirkkala and Sarpaneva created icons of timeless clarity. I want to create something that resists becoming an icon—unpredictable, unstable, eccentric. My glass works embrace accident, failure, and asymmetry. Where the classics seek control and refinement, I seek ambiguity and movement. For me, glass is less about function and more about writing sculpture into the air.

EGS: Venice represents centuries of mastery, skills passed down through generations, which is why working with Seguso is such a beautiful experience. Collaborating there takes me beyond what I can do in Finland — the techniques, the colours, the scale are different. It becomes a dialogue between my chaotic language of letters and their precise craftsmanship. The meeting of tradition and experimentation produces something neither of us could do alone. It feels like meeting the old-school graffiti pioneers in New York — I'm exposed to their style and tradition, and I learn directly from it.

EGS: It's tragic to see so many workshops close; the loss of knowledge is immense. But that decline also creates urgency: if I work in glass now, I can help keep the flame alive. For me, it's also a reminder that nothing is permanent — not walls, not nations, not traditions. My work thrives on that tension between preservation and disappearance.

EGS: Coming in as an outsider frees me from rules. I'm not bound by what glass is supposed to be. At first, some glassmakers were skeptical — why embrace mistakes or flaws? But those so-called imperfections are central to my language. Graffiti was never about perfection. The friction between tradition and experimentation creates a space for new forms that neither tradition nor outsider art alone could achieve.

EGS: The three letters are inseparable — my lifelong alphabet. In glass, I have to make them relate not just as graphics but as physical forms. The challenge is balance: each letter must hold its own but also feel part of one organism. Often, the "problem" becomes the solution — asymmetry and imbalance create the tension and vitality I'm looking for.

EGS: I've always been drawn to in-between states: legal and illegal, visible and invisible, real and fictional. The Republic of EGS grows from that same fascination — a nation without borders, yet with its own culture. The blur in my paintings mirrors the uncertainty of identity, history, and memory. I'm interested in indeterminate zones because they resist control, leaving space for imagination and dialogue. Absolute certainty is boring; the unknown is where art begins.



EGS WIP at Seguso Vetri d'Arte Murano for *INVISIBLE IDENTITY*, Spazio C21, 2025. Ph: Paolo Pellegrin.



EGS WIP at Seguso Vetri d'Arte Murano for *INVISIBLE IDENTITY*, Spazio C21, 2025. Ph: Paolo Pellegrin.



Line that Escaped from the Map, 2025. Mixed media on canvas, 150 × 150 cm. Ph. Dario Lasagni.



EGS WIP at SpazioC21i for *INVISIBLE IDENTITY*, 2025. Ph. Valerio Polici.



Night Clouds 1 Blown glass sculptures (triptych), 2024. Ph. Fabrizio Cicconi.

EGS WIP at Lasismi for *INVISIBLE IDENTITY*, Spazio C21, 2025. Ph: Marko Rantanen.

