

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Andrea K. Scott, "Guo Fengyi," *The New Yorker*, April 17, 2020

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Courtesy Gladstone Gallery

For centuries, art was considered a matter of spirit. Then, in the West, modernism sidelined the soul and centered the secular. In the process, some mystically inclined geniuses, especially women, were overlooked, including the newly canonized Swedish painter Hilma af Klint and the underappreciated Swiss spiritualist Emma Kunz. The Chinese artist Guo Fengyi didn't begin making her astonishing scrolls until 1989, when she was in her late forties. That was the year of the Tiananmen massacre, but Guo wasn't responding to world events—the mythic beings she brought to electrifying life (including the undated “Avalokiteshvara,” seen here) came to her in visions. A few years earlier, severe arthritis had forced the artist to quit her factory job in Xi'an, where she lived until her death, in 2010, at the age of sixty-eight. She took up Qigong to alleviate pain; soon she was transcribing revelations. She believed that her scrolls, most of which are twelve to thirty feet high, had the power to heal. Or you might think of them as monuments to uncertainty—“I draw because I do not know,” Guo once said—making the chimeric figures ideal viewing right now. You can read the Drawing Center's richly illustrated and very insightful publication “Guo Fengyi: To See from a Distance” online (drawingcenter.org) and tour a virtual exhibition of the artist's works at the Gladstone gallery's Web site. – [Andrea K. Scott](#)