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Hildreth Meière, *Air*, 1923, graphite on tracing paper, 7 x 9 inches. Gift of the Hildreth Meière Family Collection. Permanent collection of the National Academy of Sciences.

Hildreth Meière's Initial Drawing of *Air*

Celebrating the centennial of the National Academy of Sciences building, 1924–2024.

Art deco artist Hildreth Meière (pronounced me-AIR) created this preliminary study of *Air* for the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) building's Great Hall, which opened in 1924. Depicted as an allegorical female figure wearing flowing garments surrounded by birds in flight, *Air* is one of the four classical elements—earth, air, fire, and water—represented in the Great Hall's pendentives. Pendentives are supportive architectural elements that transition from the square corners of the floor below to the circular dome above.

Meière's finished work in the Great Hall includes three small medallions of each element, representing inventions related to that natural force. Air is depicted with a bellows, a sailboat, and a windmill.

Meière designed the iconography of the Great Hall dome, arches, and pendentives. This project was her first major commission, launching her forty-year career. Her work at the NAS building celebrates the history and significance of science, blending art nouveau and Greek and Egyptian influences with the art deco approach that became her trademark. Meière

was one of the most renowned American muralists of the twentieth century. Working with leading architects of her day, she designed approximately 100 commissions in notable buildings, including Radio City Music Hall, One Wall Street, St. Bartholomew's Church, Temple Emanu-El, and St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City, and the Nebraska State Capitol in Lincoln and the Cathedral Basilica of Saint Louis.

This drawing is included in the *One Hundred Years of Art and Architecture* exhibition at the NAS, on view through December 31, 2024.