Screen

Place of origin: Paris (made)

Date: 1923 (made)

Artist/Maker: Gray, Eileen, born 1878 - died 1976 (designer)
Gray, Eileen, born 1878 - died 1976 (maker)

Materials and Techniques: Lacquered wood, with steel rods

Credit Line: Given in memory of Charles and Lavinia Handley-Read, by their family

Museum number: W.21-1972

Gallery location: Furniture, Room 135, The Dr Susan Weber Gallery, case BY3, box EXP

Public access description
This design by Eileen Gray was a radical reworking of the traditional folding screen. It is constructed from 28 separate panels. These panels pivot on steel rods and can be adjusted to form a semi-transparent partition that is both decorative and functional. Eileen Gray probably based it on her design for the interior of an apartment in Paris, commissioned by the milliner Suzanne Talbot. There a similar ‘screen’ of 450 panels lined the walls and extended part-way into the room.

On this screen each panel is lacquered black, some have a raised square in the centre. This detail gently enhances the surface and softens the overall severity of the geometric design.

Descriptive line
Screen in black lacquer by Eileen Gray, 1924-27

Physical description
The screen is formed by 28 rectangles of black lacquer arranged in seven rows horizontally and four vertically. Each horizontal row is formed of three long horizontal rectangles, each with a square in slight relief on each side in its centre, and one smaller, vertical rectangle, the latter placed alternately at different ends of the horizontal rows, with the result that the two end vertical rows are formed of alternating long and short rectangles in opposite proportion at each end. The vertical rows are held together by seven steel rods with a brass hexagonal nut with a domed top, screwed on the top. Round flat steel plates form feet to these rods.

Dimensions
Height: 189 cm, Width: 136 cm, Depth: 2 cm, Height: 26.5 cm panel, Width: 40 cm panel (long), Width: 160 cm panel (short), Depth: 20 cm panel

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Object history note
This screen is one of three black examples designed and probably made by Eileen Gray. Another one is in the Robert Walker Collection. A version of the screen in white was shown at the Artistes Decorateurs in 1923.

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O70947/screen-gray-eileen/