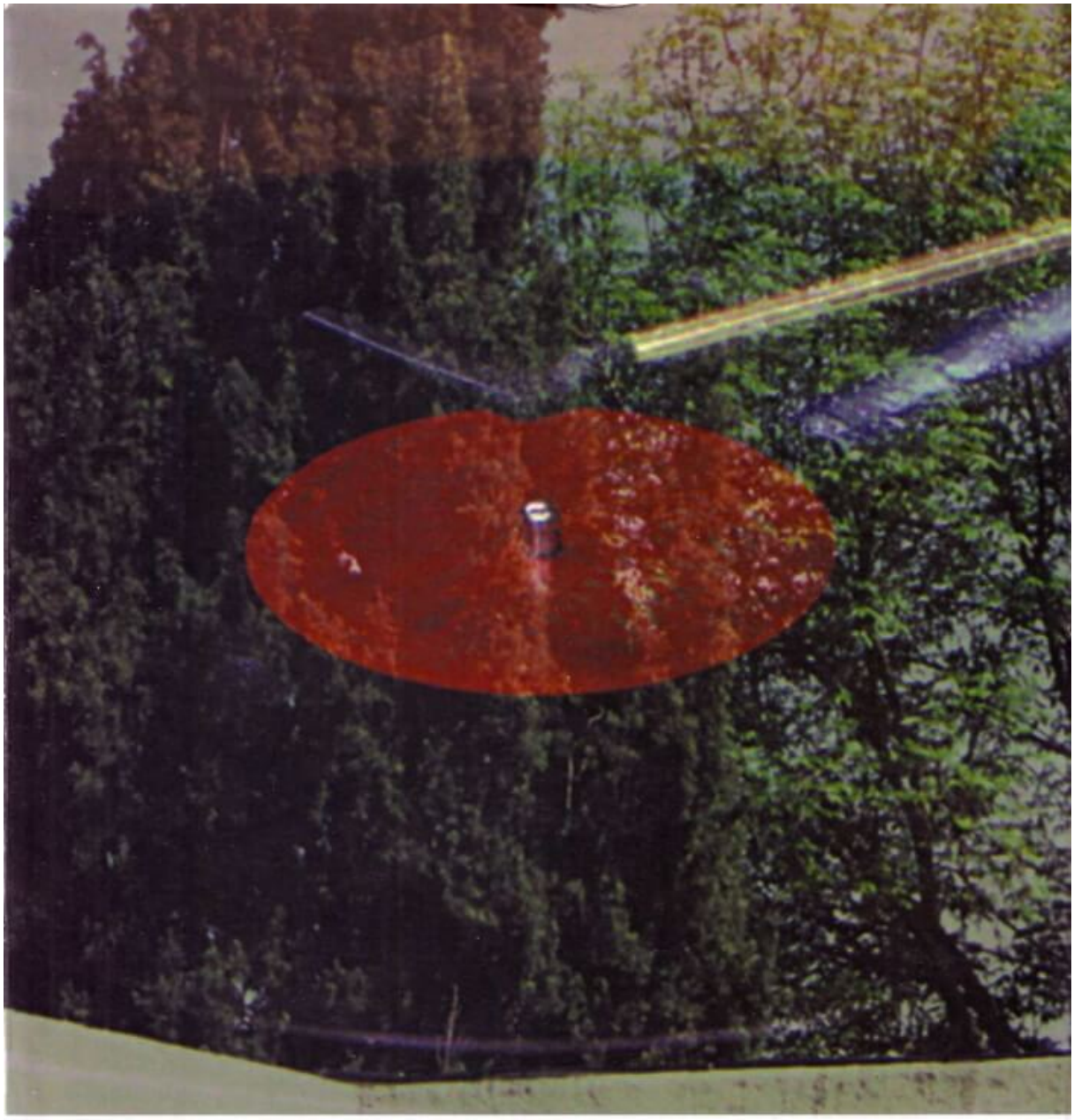
The Air is Blue: El muro rojo

Edited by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Pedro Reyes

Terence Gower: *El muro rojo*

Trilce Editions, Mexico City, 2006

Related Project: The Red Wall (El muro rojo)



the air is blue

Insights on art & architecture: LUIS BARRAGAN REVISITED

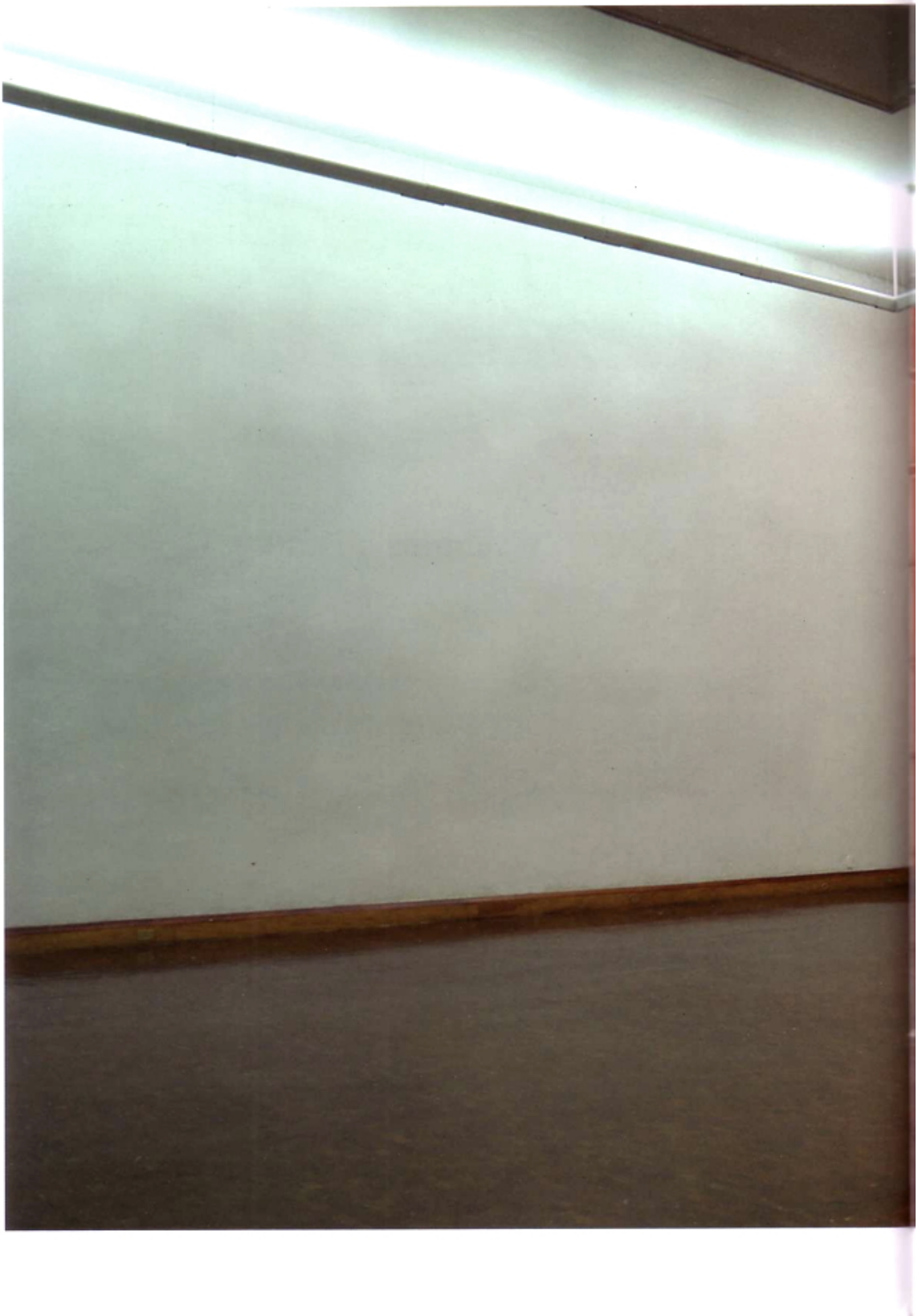
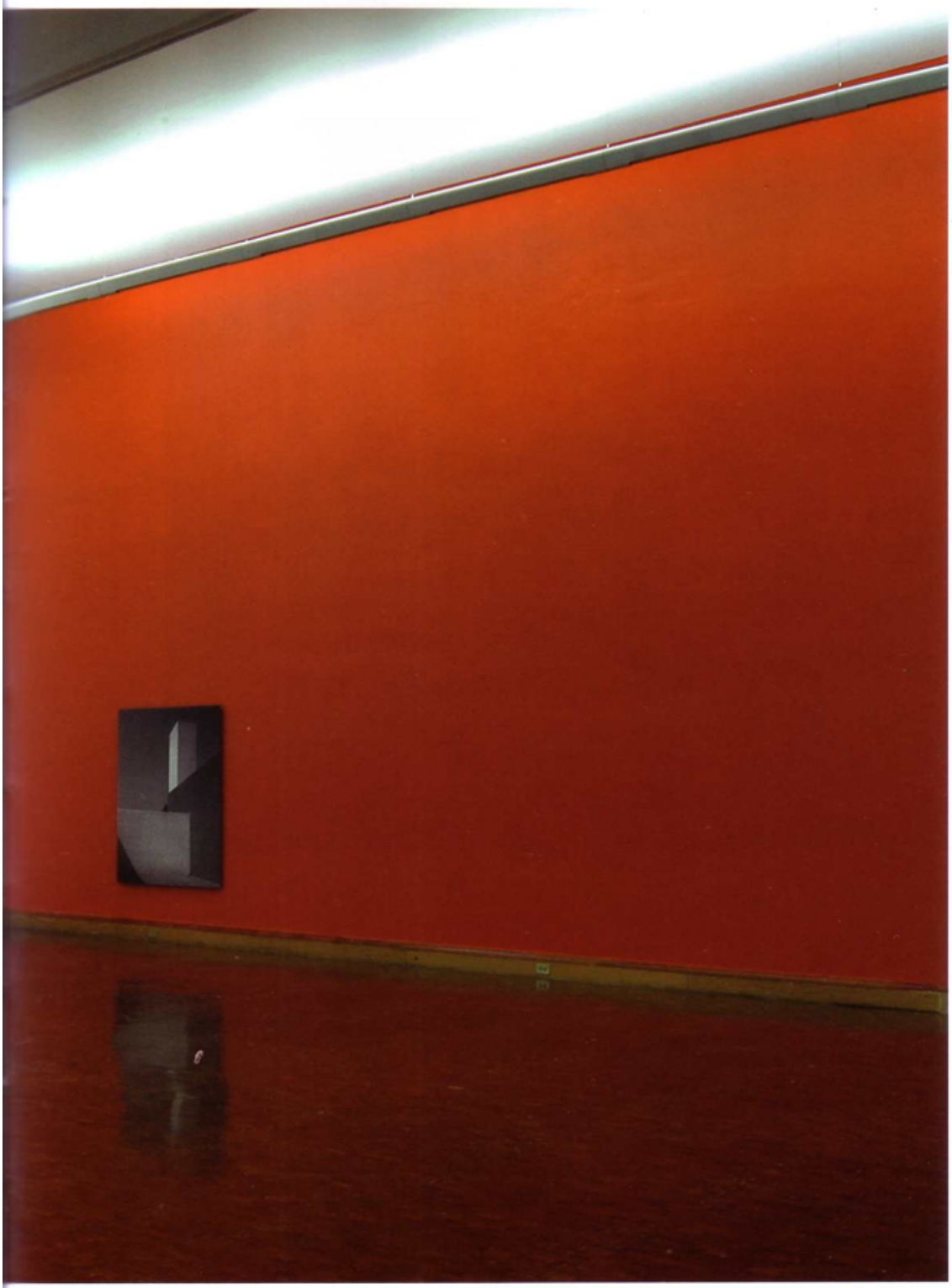
Edited by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Pedro Reyes

A project by LAR / Fernando Romero

El muro rojo, 2005.
c–print on sintra mounted on painted wall.
Photograph by Jorge del Olmo.

"The red wall" is an investigation of the optical and spatial qualities of the color red in architecture. An enormous red wall supports a large black and white photograph. This photograph is a retake of Armando Salas Portugal's famous image of the Casa Barragán roof patio. The artist commissioned architectural photographer Jorge del Olmo to copy the Salas Portugal image. "The red wall" combines the artist's research on color with his study of black and white architectural photography. The photographer Walter Peterhans, a close associate of Mies van der Rohe at the Bauhaus, described architectural photography as a "process of precise detailing in half tones." This statement takes on more meaning when we look at Salas Portugal's black and white photographs of Barragán's multichromatic architecture. We see different tones of grey represent distinct colors, red among them. Anyone used to looking at mid-20th century architectural photographs is used to perceiving these structures in a purely volumetric sense, devoid of the optical, spatial effects of color. This is what Laszlo Moholy-Nagy referred to as color's potential for "space articulation." For example, a white room is perceived to have different proportions when one wall is painted red. This can contribute to two distinct experiences of Barragán's work: the perception of his work as pure plane and volume, as displayed in the black and white printed sources of his time, and the intense spatial/optical experience of visiting his architecture and coming into contact with the brightly colored planes. "The red wall" stages both a visual and physical encounter with the architecture by juxtaposing the black and white reproduction with a red wall, similar to the one in the photograph. This experiment is brought into the museum, where the largest number of viewers can experience it.

Terence Gower



THE RED WALL