

The Painter Is Absent:

Ivar Arosenius and the Site-Specific Archaeo-Archival Reconstruction of the Ghost of a Home

by Jonathan Westin & Dick Claésson

“AS WITH THE UNKNOWNABILITY of the *Ding an sich*, the inaccessibility of the actual past represents a significant limitation and barrier, but by no means a ruinous one. The historian and the archaeo-historicist are left to practice their craft on traces of a vanished past.”¹

Introduction

During the late hours of the first day of 1909, the Swedish painter Ivar Arosenius (1878–1909) succumbed to haemophilia. He died a young man, on the brink of recognition, fame and domestic bliss. Leaving his young wife and infant daughter behind at their home in *Älvängen*, north of Gothenburg, he also left a vast body of work which has continued to attract critical as well as popular attention. Visiting the site of his home today, more than a century later, no trace of either the house or the garden remains to remind the casual visitor of the significance of the place. This was, after all, where Arosenius lived between 1907 and 1909, transforming a simple cottage into a quiet, rural retreat – creating a backdrop for a significant part of his substantial production – and at the same time making great artistic progress. At the time of his death, he had already reshaped the landscape through the medium of art, using the river valley and the surrounding hills as a mythological setting, populating it with trolls, fairies, and bacchanalian revelry.² Arosenius was not alone in making his modest home a source of inspiration and expression. In 1899, ten years prior, the

Swedish painter Carl Larsson and his wife Karin Larsson installed a large studio window in their once-modest cottage at Lilla Hyttnäs in Sundborn. This occasion marked the end of the first phase of rebuilding and expansion at Sundborn; through the publication of illustrated books and magazines, the idyll that the Larssons created rapidly became a icon of romanticized homebuilding and domestic bliss, coupled with the promise of artistic potential. Arosenius – and others – paid close attention.

The Arts and Crafts movement in general, and the work of William Morris in particular, was a significant inspiration for this sudden attention to the artistic potential of the old, traditional homestead of bygone days. The home became a canvas on which the artist could – quite literally, in fact – inscribe his or her ideals of creativity and tradition. Combining the romanticized mythology of the farmer and his ascetic yet spiritually meaningful family life with the vibrant colours and clear lines of medieval art, painters like Arosenius could fuse the ideals of the past with those of the twentieth century – and with modernity. Transforming the homes and landscapes of old allowed a palimpsest of past and present to emerge. Both Arosenius and Larsson in effect attempted to reconstruct what they viewed as an integral part of the idea of the countryside – but it was a reconstruction based on the schematics of myth and legend, on wild interpretations of use and tradition, and also on an idealized image of the authenticity of the life and customs of the countryside.



FIGURE 1: *The site of Arosenius' home in November 2016. Beyond the muddy field left by the bulldozers, and the last remains of the overgrown hawthorn hedge, Kattleberg, present in many of Arosenius' paintings, dominates the skyline. PHOTO: Dick Claésson.*

During the years and decades following his death, Arosenius' posthumous reputation grew, and his artworks achieved national as well as international recognition. Today, he is regarded as a major Swedish painter, a fact belied by the site of his old homestead (figure 1). To turn this bleak prospect of rural entropy and collapsed agricultural economics into anything even remotely interesting, let alone into a place of historical importance reflecting its significance, takes an equal effort of imagination and of translating what remains of the site into a coherent space. Archives have to be activated, stories have to be collected and collated, new paths have to be cleared through the undergrowth.

The Arosenius Project, founded by the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities together with the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation, involves a number of departments and divisions at the University of Gothenburg as well as the Swedish National Museum in Stockholm and the Museum of Art in Gothenburg. Building on the foundations of

the Ivar Arosenius Archive at the University Library in Gothenburg, the project has established a platform for collecting the digitized material from several *additional* archives, both public and private, into a whole. Here, both well- and lesser-known works, as well as documents that have until now remained largely forgotten, are made readily available. The small piece of land in Älvängen finds itself at the centre of this new archiving process, as much of the material was produced there during Arosenius' last two years. Letters, sketches, and paintings – all tell the tale of Arosenius' life and work in Älvängen. Artefacts of a more ephemeral nature, such as local anecdotes passed down through the generations, also provide materials for a more detailed and thorough understanding of the artist's life. The home in Älvängen is thus the *locus* of both the art and the life that the archive tries to represent. Now, however, nothing remains of the site itself. The trees, bushes, and scrub have been cut down and bulldozers have erased the last features of the land. A carwash is to replace the

remnants of Arosenius' home³. Hence, just as interest in the artist blossoms, the site-specific archive that is *Arosenius' Älvängen* – the lost ruins of the artist's home and *sterbezimmer* – is threatened by archival amnesia.

Drawing on an interventional research investigation into Arosenius' home, this article frames the act of digitally reconstructing a site as an iterative research method of enquiry and translation between different media – an act that allows heterogeneous materials to be simultaneously collected, studied, and processed. Built on source material consisting of archival photos, local stories, historic maps, paintings, 3D-scanned artefacts, sound recordings, inventories of the belongings of the artist and his family, and surveys of the vegetation on his property, the digital reconstruction processes all the material pertaining to this particular part of the artist's life. We argue that the act of reconstruction allows us to trace materials otherwise overlooked, and to both study and question the archive in new ways. The reconstruction of Arosenius's last home is the *archaeo-archival* embodiment of the archiving process.

Lost and Found: The Process of Reconstruction

On the 6th of April 1973, in a newspaper article describing the house as a stain on the memory of a singular artist, director Adlerbert – at that time the owner of the property – is quoted as saying that following not only repeated attempts at selling the house and grounds, but also a discouraging investigation into the possibility of performing substantial reconstruction work, the house would be torn down the very same year⁴. Due to this decision, following decades of neglect, the house and the layout of the grounds, with their root cellar, barn, outhouse, and a vividly decorated gazebo, are now lost (figure 2). Today, the small piece of land on the outskirts of Älvängen is marked with no more than the rectangular shape of the lines of dense trees and brush that have claimed the space in the painter's absence.

The act of reconstruction will always reveal

a dearth of information: archives and memory are never sufficient. Digitally reconstructing Arosenius' home is the active part of what Favro calls a knowledge representation⁵: it is not only a visual manifestation of the physical and digital archive documentation, but also a process of knowledge acquisition and evaluation. Hence, reconstruction is a research method that begins not with answers, but with a series of questions. In fact, as Murteira *et al.* point out⁶, the process of extracting information from a model being developed constitutes knowledge acquisition by itself, and is, as such, also an important research result by itself.

Scientific visualisation emerged in the fifteenth century as an important method through which to record findings from expeditions in far-away places, in essence making these findings 'mobile' by turning them into inscriptions that could be brought back home, be shared and analysed⁷. In the nineteenth century, at a time when traditional scientific illustration was becoming increasingly abstract and restrained in style, the reconstruction drawing, at first in the fields of palaeontology and geology but soon thereafter in prehistoric archaeology as well, gained ground as an unparalleled technique to lend life and context to scientific findings⁸. This development was echoed in the steady increase in material reconstructions of monuments and sites, a practice that during the twentieth century gave rise to a number of charters drafted to offer counsel – including the Athens Charter (1931), the Venice Charter (1964), The Florence Charter (1981), the Dresden Declaration on Reconstruction (1982), the Nara Document on Authenticity (1994), and the Krakow Charter (2000). In response to a perceived acceleration on a global scale in the use of reconstructions, both physical and digital, in 2012 the International Council on Museums and Sites (ICOMOS) commissioned a survey to chart professional attitudes towards this practice, and also to assess how the reconstructions relate to the recommendations laid out in the charters, all of which urge caution and restraint⁹. As the Venice Charter puts it, 'all reconstruction work should however be ruled out *a priori*. Only anastylosis, that is to say, the



FIGURE 2. One of the last photos of the house before it was torn down in 1973. PHOTO: Lars Söderbom. From the photographic archive of Göteborgs-Posten at Kamerareportage.

reassembling of existing but dismembered parts can be permitted.¹⁰

The charters argue that reconstructions raise concerns of historical validity as they present persuasive and strong interpretations that are almost impossible to ‘un-know’, while at the same time turning the process of their construction opaque. Hence, whether physical or digital, while being a synthesis of information, a reconstruction might also be described as a dialysis as it separates the unwanted or unknown from the construction, and reduces complex associations and interdependencies to an ordered, and fictitious, whole¹¹. Hence, reconstructions are never neutral: by default, certain *properties* are inscribed into the reconstruction itself. If the reconstruction is allowed to become a part of the idea of the place, these properties are made durable by being translated into a seemingly material form, as seeing is often believing¹². While the sciences make extensive use of images, simulations, and reconstructions to present ideas, in archaeology and other historical disciplines

there is far less use of visualisations when the subject is theoretical¹³. However, if these disciplines were accustomed to the visualisation of ideas they might, as Favro puts it, ‘supplant the axiom “to see is to believe” with “to see is to question”¹⁴, paving the way for a more constructive approach to visual representations.

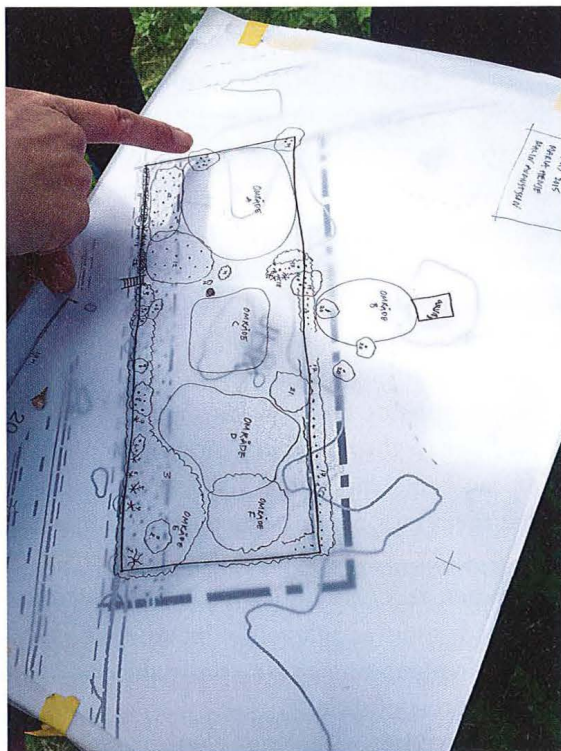
A reconstruction moves us simultaneously farther away and closer to the primary sources upon which the reconstruction is built – *away* from the sources, as they are the result of an interpretation and as such are perceived by many scholars as losing the inherent validity of the material remains upon which they are based¹⁵, and *closer* to those sources, since a reconstruction can bring the primary sources to life and place them in a context where further theories and hypotheses can be explored¹⁶. Still, as Silberman notes, reconstructions are in some quarters ‘frowned upon as inherently inauthentic imitations of real monuments (i.e those that have survived the test of time)¹⁷.

The ICOMOS survey puts physical and digital

reconstructions on an equal footing, only noting that physical reconstructions can be more invasive 'and damaging to the surviving original fabric of archaeological or historical sites'¹⁸. However, the unvoiced presumption which positions a reconstruction as a physical public manifestation – an object that is brought forth as a representation of missing matter rather than being an ongoing scientific process – is not changed from the Venice Charter that precedes the ICOMOS survey by half a century. The result of the survey, however, is more telling: while only 11% of the physical reconstructions appear to have had research as a rationale or function (favouring tourism and site development at no less than 65%), the virtual reconstructions favour *research* as a rationale for their existence at 42%. The survey thus reflects that while digital reconstructions have found prominent use within humanities research¹⁹ and have facilitated critical discussions on the application of digital tools within the context of heritage management, they are still seldom deployed in situ – through augmented reality, projection or screen – to enhance a site or monument and attract tourism. Instead, the digital reconstructions, due to the relatively low

cost of producing them, have seen use as research tools through which to test hypotheses and visualize interpretations.

Despite this, and equally applicable to both physical and digital reconstructions, the generally used definition of reconstruction as the representation of a lost physical reality, ignores the active process of making a reconstruction. In our use of the word, the reconstruction of Arosenius' home is an action, not an artefact. The *act of reconstructing*, closer to the definition of reconstruction as an 'action or process' rather than 'a thing that has been rebuilt'²⁰, is a process through which to assemble stepping stones for other processes and actants leading to insights about sources, context, and place otherwise overlooked²¹. As an active process, the reconstruction of the site is both a product and a means of productivity, as the practice embodies a transformative dimension²². Reconstruction is a visual representation practice, and like any other it is not only a crucial step in the dissemination of results, but also plays a central role in the scientific process of developing theories, as images 'have the capacity to *make* knowledge'²³.



Reconstructing the Lands of Myth and Legend

While Arosenius remains firmly situated within the confines of Swedish art history, the place where he lived, worked and died – and where all that promise of greatness came to climactic, if brief, fruition – is largely forgotten. Our research into Arosenius' home, which took place between May 2015 and December 2016, included numerous visits in which we made use of the digital archive to identify sightlines, foundations, and landmarks. Assessing the site merely through field walking – looking for scraps of evidence to firmly establish the boundaries of the site, as well as the foundations of the house, the barn and the gazebo (all parts of a typical,

FIGURE 3. Initial inventory of the vegetation and a rough sketch of the garden. PHOTO: Dick Claésson.

Swedish homestead of the late nineteenth century) – proved difficult, as the heavy foliage and thick moss camouflaged much of the remaining stones and tell-tale clusters of brick and building debris. We needed the archival materials to make some sense of the place.

Through a combination of on-site surveys and studies of archival materials, we were able to plot a general outline of the historical garden; we were also able to position the location of the house itself. This was achieved by establishing an inventory of the current vegetation on the site and comparing it with both digitized photos from the Arosenius Archive and with paintings by Arosenius that are believed to depict scenes from the garden and the surrounding area. These inventories were then collated to eliminate plants, bushes, and trees dating from later decades, and a rough sketch of the present day flora as it relates to the original Arosenius site was compiled (figure 3). The old pear tree that Arosenius planted, the hawthorn hedge framing many of the scenes in the old photographs, the gooseberries, and the goat willow trees: these became living anchor points for the reconstruction of the site that framed the remains of the old root cellar (another anchor point), photographs from the Arosenius archive, news clippings in the archive of the local old homestead museum, and a mounted colour photograph in the museum collection. As the ever-changing trees and hedges may be traced back in time through the documents, providing a constant backdrop to the materials in the archive, they tie the archive to the place while acknowledging the passage of time. When looking at the withered pear tree, or the overgrown hawthorn hedge, we are brought closer to the young artist that planted the tree, or to Eva as she reclines in her garden chair in front of the hedge (figure 4). But it also gives us a reference for the time that has passed. Family photographs, oral histories of the place passed down by local citizens as well as by family and friends, pictures painted by

Arosenius depicting exterior and interior views of the house and the surrounding landscape, letters, maps, probate documents, and old survey documents – every piece of the puzzle provided yet more facets to a lost home slowly gaining a new kind of tangibility, and familiarity, from the gradual decoding of the site. As the Florence Charter states regarding the reconstruction of a historical garden, ‘all its constituent features must be dealt with simultaneously. To isolate the various operations would damage the unity of the whole’²⁴.

Paint fragments were collected from the soft earth – and discarded, once a closer study had shown them to be of a later date. Shards of pottery and porcelain, window glass fragments and bottle glass, roof tiles, and the charred fragments of an eighteenth-century terracotta candlestick were salvaged from the site and added to the existing archives. Sounds of the birds and of the wind going through the overgrown hedges were recorded and separated from the white noise of the nearby highway built in the 1960s. The present-day skyline was documented by stitching together a dozen panoramic photos, which were then retouched using the county



FIGURE 4. *Eva Arosenius, reclining in her chair in front of the orchard. Photographer unknown. From Konstnären Ivar Arosenius handlingar at Gothenburg University Library.*

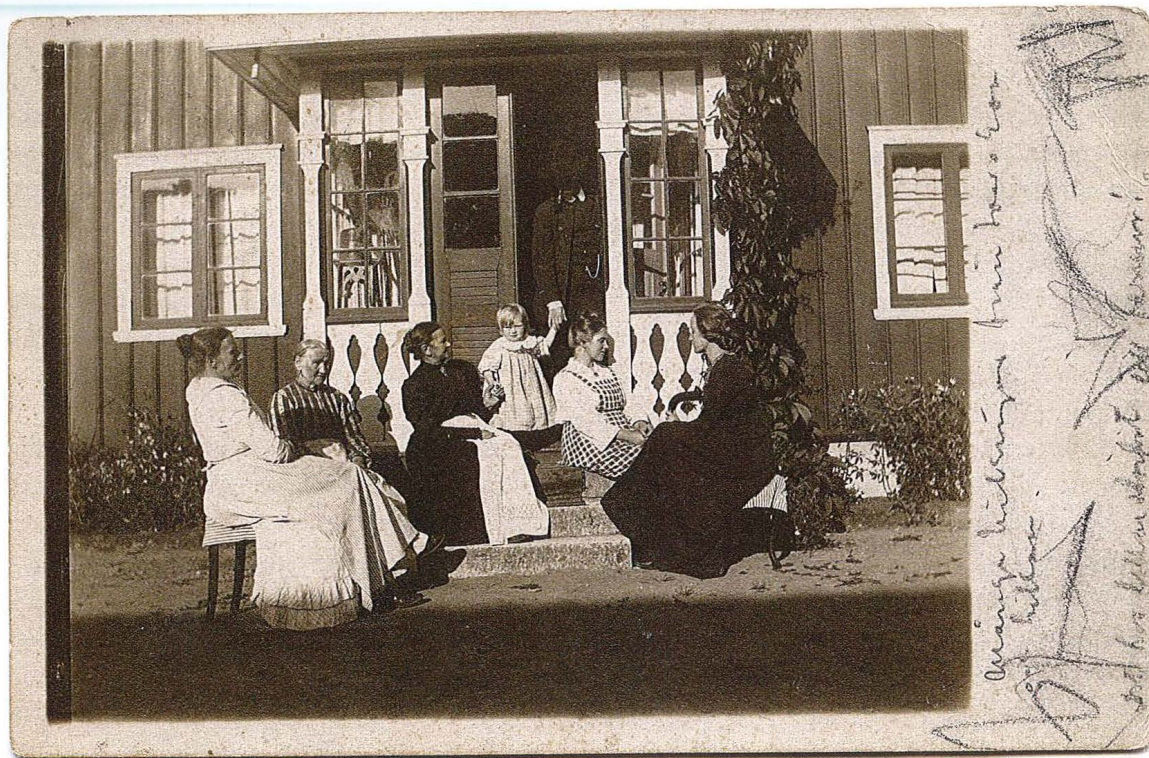


FIGURE 5. *The homestead in Älvängen 1908. Photographer unknown. From Konstnären Ivar Arosenius handlingar at Gothenburg University Library.*

topographical survey map of 1890–97²⁵, allowing us to remove irrelevant twentieth-century structures from the landscape. The root cellar was digitized using structure-from-motion photogrammetry as well as a survey of the remaining parts of the structure. The digitized cellar was then reconstructed using photos taken in 1971 for an article in the newspaper *Göteborgs-Posten* as a guide²⁶. Though the photos were not included in the published newspaper article, they had been archived and resurfaced when we put in a request to gain access to the published photos. The same archive also provided photo documentation of the state of the ruined gazebo in 1971, and also, in a series of photos taken in the 1950s, of the few remaining paintings on its ceiling.

Yet the archive, the anecdotes and the site did not all add up. The barn, said to contain the outhouse that was decorated with caricatures depicting ‘enemies’ from the art academy²⁷, would not – for the purposes of the digital reconstruction – stay in one place. It kept moving

around. Was it already gone in the 1930s? Or was it vandalized and stripped of the caricatures in 1967?²⁸ Or, as local stories would have it, was the artwork dismantled by relatives and surreptitiously moved to a ski bar in the United States in the 1950s?

As we pored over the old photographs, one in particular drew our attention. It appeared to depict a social occasion of some kind in front of the house (figure 5). Arosenius, standing on the stairs holding his daughter by the hand, is almost unrecognisable due to the heavy shadows falling on his face. Clear outlines of a structure, breaking the sunlight, can be seen on the gravelled ground in front of the house. But what cast that great shadow? The reconstruction could not, at that point, provide us with an answer.

It was only when we were able to access a series of aerial survey photographs, dating from 1931 up to and including 1978, that the history of the site fell into place, firmly establishing a timeline that both confirmed and contradicted our preliminary findings. The grainy aerial pho-

tography, shot as early as 1931, provided firm evidence of the early layout of the site which contradicted assumptions we had made based on later and, as it turned out, irrelevant imagery. The barn and the outhouse, described in our sources as being part of the same structure and situated between the courtyard and the fields leading down to the river, were initially separate buildings. In Arosenius' lifetime, only the outhouse had occupied the spot indicated by our sources, while the barn were instead located at a position opposite the west-facing front of the house. Sometime in the late 1930s or early 1940s, Arosenius' barn is replaced with a new one, built at an angle to the previous barn at the spot our sources indicate, gently supporting the by then ancient outhouse. The story of the decorated outhouse, the theft of its art and its decay, had thus been transformed by the limits of both archive and living memory into this new barn, and then found its way into our reconstruction process before being questioned.

The original barn, now brought into the reconstruction process, could finally help us to not only understand the shadow in the photograph, but also the moment in time when the camera framed it. By reconstructing the light conditions to match the shadow, it became highly probable that the shutter had opened, and closed, sometime around five in the afternoon in early July, 1908, perhaps on Arosenius' daughter's second birthday on the fourth of that month (figure 6). Surely such an occasion would call for a family photograph?

Moreover, the aerial photographs showed us the outlines of gravel pathways that, even though the trees obscured much of the detail beneath, allowed us to situate the gazebo at the end of an old pathway. No actual fragments of the gazebo existed: this was purely based on archival research and the placement was posited as a highly probable conjecture.

By placing the aerial photographs as textures on top of our hypothetical model of the site, we were able to test the validity of our initial rough sketch (figure 7). Though only minor corrections to the boundaries of the garden and the placement of the house were necessary, the

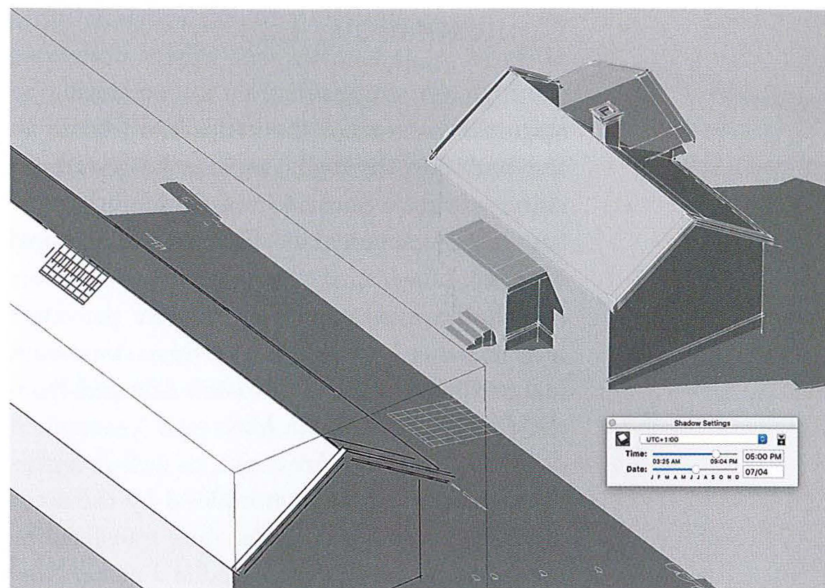


FIGURE 6. *Shadow simulation using the reconstruction. Models and composition by Jonathan Westin.*



FIGURE 7. *The archival material as the foundation of the virtual reconstruction. Models and composition by Jonathan Westin.*

more cramped space created between the house and the original barn, now positioned opposite the porch, changed both the character and the balance of the site. The space became intimate, an inner courtyard – an extension of the family's living quarters – defined by the house, the barn, and the kitchen garden. In contrast, the back-yard opened up as a more natural space of recreation and social activity. In an instant the space was inverted: sightlines had to be reassessed, and the photographs and the documents of the archive had to be consulted anew to describe this reconsidered reconstruction of the site.

Contextualizing Life

Through the reconstruction we are trying to stage the content of the archive and bring affect back into the digital archive. Just as the archive contains a translation of Arosenius' home, first into documents and files, and later, when digitized, into bits, the reconstruction of Arosenius' home is an attempt to translate these bits into meaning by reassembling their context. A few architectural elements were salvaged from the dilapidated house in May, 1970²⁹ – a pair of doors decorated by Arosenius, as well as a plastered masonry stove immortalized by the artist in a painting showing his daughter transfixed by the light of a candlestick placed in a niche. Now reassembled in the old homestead museum, the storied stove has been cut down, its base shortened, in order for it to fit into its new, cramped surroundings. Nevertheless, it remains an iconic relic of Arosenius' home and studio. The painted doors, illustrating the painter's playfulness but also, unfortunately, the verdict conservator Arne Kennroth uttered in 1967 – 'these will be problematic to conserve'³⁰ – now hang suspended from a wall, removed from their original setting

and use. As such they constitute an assemblage that tells us nothing of their meaning. In the archaeological sense of the word, an assemblage is the result of both natural and cultural processes grouping artefacts together at a particular time and place³¹, but the assemblage is also reliant on an archaeologist to recognise it and classify it as such. While an archive or museum collection constitutes an assemblage in its own right, it is an assemblage that may provide us more insight into an everyday archival practice than into the context of the individual artefacts or documents themselves³². Counter to this, the act of reconstructing Arosenius' home is, by its very nature, an investigation into both the limits of the *archive view* – that which the archive lets us perceive – and the product of activating and giving depth to the archive by reassembling it – bringing the documents together with the site of their origin.

The doors, the stove, and the documents of the archives are all artefacts of a physical site that today yield very little to unprepared visitors. It is the combination of *all* of these elements that offers a reconstruction that transcends the atomism of its individual parts. The reconstruc-

FIGURE 8. Two of the paintings recontextualized on the ceiling of the gazebo. Models and composition by Jonathan Westin.



tion, for instance, fixes the parameters of the interpretation of the paintings on the doors – what rooms did the doors lead to, and were the paintings adapted to the functions of the rooms? The reconstruction also provides a new framework for the interpretation of Arosenius' paintings now lost, documented only in black-and-white photos in the archives. To once again allow them to adorn the ceiling of the gazebo (figure 8) and the outhouse walls, as well as the interior walls of the house, reveals the context of their origin.

The reconstruction allows the documents in the archive to be framed not only as *archive documents*, but as artefacts reflecting – and re-situating – the relationship that ties Arosenius' art to his surroundings. As Derrida puts it, archives are at once institutive and conservative, revolutionary and traditional, as the 'archivization produces as much as it records'³³; while organising factual statements they also produce historical narratives. Indeed, an archive, through the technical mechanisms involved in archiving, the limitations of storage, and the impossibility of collecting everything within a given subject, offers a skewed representation of the past and is no more than a 'prosthesis of so called live-memory'³⁴.

In Derrida's reading the question of the archive is not a question of the past, but is instead a question of the *future*: what uses can be drawn from the archive in the future³⁵? Likewise, the act of reconstructing is not about restoring the past, it's about using the archive for future endeavours. As Silberman writes, commenting on the Dubai Document³⁶, reconstruction 'is not a conservation approach but an engagement approach that can help reconnect people with place, history, and landscape'³⁷. Hence, 'to reconstruct' should not be confused with 'to restore', a term that lays bare the belief that we can turn back time and bring an unmediated artefact back to an earlier phase in its career. This has been critically discussed by, among others, Muños Viñas³⁸ and Hughes³⁹. Hughes summarizes the idea of a complete 'restoration' as '[betraying] an assumption that the restored object is identical to the original, and simultane-

ously disavows the idea that the restorer's intervention might have changed the [object] in any significant way'⁴⁰. Thus, the first syllable of reconstruction does not denote faithfulness to an original meaning, but instead points to a new cycle in the life of the non-surviving site, landscape, monument, structure or object, one through which new meanings and interpretations may emerge. Just as, in Derrida's words, the act of archivization produces as much as it records, the act of reconstruction both records our current knowledge and produces new insights.

Conclusions

Arosenius moved into an old homestead that was small and insignificant and transformed it, through rebuilding and remodelling, into an artist's studio. While reshaping a home that had originally been built to provide shelter for a farmer and his family in the nineteenth century, Arosenius was not only restructuring his own life and that of his family – moving from the big city to the unassuming countryside – he was also reflecting the ambitions of other artists and painters, such as the Swedish painter Carl Larsson and his wife Karin Larsson at their cottage at Lilla Hyttnäs in Sundborn. Inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement, these artists rediscovered the idea of the countryside through myth and legend, and through an idealized perception of the authenticity of rural settings.

Myth and legend was Arosenius' stock-in-trade. While he ordered his paints and papers from Paris and Berlin, he conjured the images he would paint from the river, the hills, the flowers and the animals surrounding him. *His* reconstruction became the backdrop for stories derived in equal parts from tradition and legend. Such luxury is not permitted the researchers attempting to reconstruct his 'reconstruction'.

As this article has argued, the reconstruction of a site is not a process of re-assembling known pieces into a whole through which to communicate already established ideas, but rather an iterative research method of investigation and translation that allows heterogeneous materi-

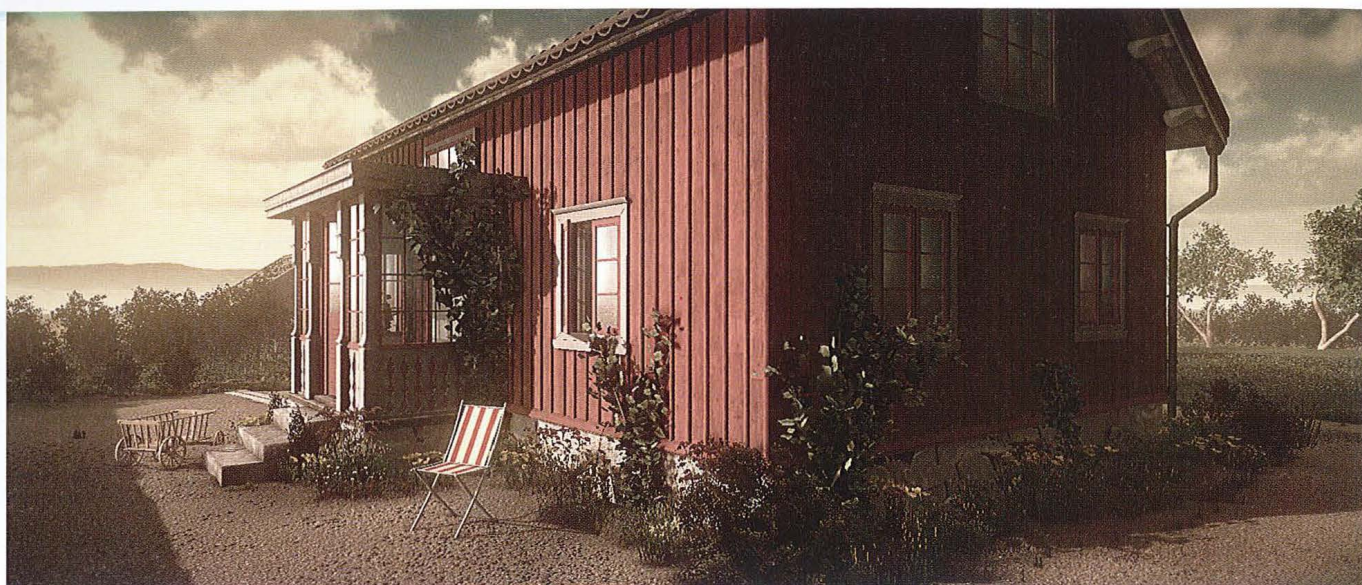


FIGURE 9. A view from inside the virtual reconstruction of the home and garden of Ivar Arosenius. Models and composition by Jonathan Westin.

als to be simultaneously collated, studied, and processed in the reassembling process. One key question for us in the Arosenius project is how to bring physicality, context and affect back to the digital archive. The reconstruction tries both to bring some aspects of the archive back to life and to be an analytical model that generates and stores intangible information. As such, it is both a reflection of our visual and textual archive and a carrier of personal stories and memories. As a tool through which we communicate with informants and activate them as co-creators, the reconstruction becomes a vessel that contains a visual processing of their knowledge and active participation. As an assemblage, the reconstruction is therefore not only the sum of artefacts and documents but also of humans. This heterogeneous grouping, closer to assemblages in the theories of Deleuze and Guattari⁴¹ than an archaeological assemblage, is at once dependant on its individual components for its construction and independent, as the construction constitutes a framework with no central 'nervous system'. As Harrison puts it, 'agency is distributed across and through the assemblage, as well as within it'⁴². While textual documentation of knowledge can be very imprecise, a dialogue using images often taps into more detailed ac-

counts. As Leonhart Fuch notes in *De historia stirpium commentarii*, published in 1542, 'Who would in his right mind condemn pictures which can communicate information much more clearly than the words of even the most eloquent men'⁴³? Fuch realised not only the importance of visual representation for scientific work, but also the importance of the processes, technologies, humans, and craftsmanship through which findings were translated into visual representation⁴⁴.

With the reconstruction we have aimed to construct a synthesis of heterogeneous and sometimes conflicting materials and present them both as a point of access into the life of Ivar Arosenius and his art and as a repository (figure 9). Fuch points out that 'those things presented to the eyes and depicted on panels of paper become fixed more firmly in the mind than those that are described in bare words'⁴⁵. The ability to persuade without having to weave an argument around sources is often posed as a critique of reconstructed monuments or milieus, whether physical or digital, in polygons or in woodcut⁴⁶. However justified, this critique does not apply to reconstruction as an active process in which the 'thing that has been rebuilt', is but an artefact of this process.

Instead, we argue that it is the *act* of reconstructing Arosenius' home that has allowed us to trace materials otherwise overlooked, and to study and question the archive and the archival process, as well as additional sources, in new ways through contextualisation. Through this process, we have not only turned the overgrown grove into a coherent space where we now can trace through the undergrowth, both on site and in our virtual model, the paths interlocking house and cellar, gazebo, barn and outhouse. We can navigate the archival photos, the news clippings, the letters, and the art and know where in this assemblage we are situated. The landscape is brought back to a previous point in time, and the house – or at least the reimagined outline of the house – reappears within it. Hedges, trees, roads, dust, flowers, the sounds and smells of the countryside – all combine to form a picture that is constantly changing according to new (or old) information filtered through archaeo-archival reinterpretation. This process is never-ending. This process denies easy closure – and also, hopefully, stagnant conclusions.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Malin Augustsson for her help in putting together the inventory of the current vegetation on the site, the digitized photos from the Arosenius Archive, and the paintings by Arosenius that are believed to depict scenes from the garden and the surrounding area. Furthermore, we wish to thank Anders Larsson, Astrid Thorstensson and Inga-Britt Karlhom for their invaluable input.

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Notes

- 1 Hume 1999, p. 19.
- 2 Asplund 1928, p. 107–118; Sandström 1959, p. 184–197; Fredlund 2009, p. 155–195.
- 3 Ale 2015.
- 4 *Elfsborgs läns tidning* 1973-04-06.
- 5 Favro 2006.
- 6 Murteira *et al.* 2017.
- 7 Latour 1990, p. 6.
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The Painter Is Absent:

Ivar Arosenius and the Site-Specific Archaeo-Archival Reconstruction of the Ghost of a Home

By Jonathan Westin & Dick Claésson

Summary

This article discusses the digital reconstruction of the home and garden of the famous Swedish painter Ivar Arosenius (1878-1909). The small piece of land in Älvängen finds itself at the centre of a new archiving process, as much of the material now being digitized in the Arosenius Project was produced there during the artist's last few years. In describing the reconstruction process, the act of digitally reconstructing a site and a built environment is framed as an iterative research method of enquiry and translation between different media – an act that allows heterogeneous materials to be simultaneously collected, studied, and processed. As such, the

reconstruction is posed as not only a visual manifestation of the physical and digital archive documentation, but also a process of knowledge acquisition and evaluation. The reconstruction allows the documents of the archive to be framed not only as *archive documents*, but as artefacts reflecting – and resituating – the relationship that ties Arosenius' art to his surroundings. The reconstruction tries both to bring some aspects of the archive back to life and to be an analytical model that generates and stores intangible information. As such, it is both a reflection of our visual and textual archive and a carrier of personal stories and memories.

Keywords: Ivar Arosenius, reconstruction, visualisation, archive, archaeo-archival, contextualization