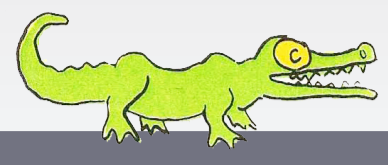# Conjuring up the Artist from the Archives:
Ivar Arosenius

What processes are involved in translating a physical archive into a digital?

Can we give body, context, and affect back to a digitized material?

These are questions we investigate through a three-year project about Ivar Arosenius, a Swedish artist and writer who met an untimely death in early 1909, only 30 years of age and within months of his big breakthrough. During the subsequent years and decades, his substantial production earned him recognition posthumously both nationally and internationally, and today he is one of the most renowned Swedish artists. The project has instigated a number of studies of what knowledge and aspects can be added through different technological developments, as well as what knowledge and values are lost or threatened in a digitization process. In parallel to our work with staging the artist from the archives, we study how previous stagings – exhibitions, books, studies – have mediated and affected the image of Ivar Arosenius.

In building a digital archive of Arosnius, we follow the material as it travels from the manuscript vault into the digitization studio, mapping all the actants involved in shedding it of its physicality. This is a translation process that functions to rephrase the archival material with the purpose of making it mobile and conform to those protocols that define something as being digital. This rephrasing does not only remove physicality, but does also introduce a whole new vocabulary, words describing the digital format, that in many ways replaces the one that art historians, archivists and conservators use to describe the manuscripts.

Much of the material pertains to Arosenius' home in Älvängen, torn down in the early seventies after decades of neglect. Using the archive as a source, we have assembled a virtual model in Unity where the connection between artist, art and place is investigated to catch the way Arosenius has translated his surroundings and to contextualize the documents of the archive.

With this interactive reconstruction we aim to construct a synthesis of a heterogeneous and sometimes conflicting material that can be used both as an access-point to the life of Ivar Arosenius and his art, and as a repository: built on a source material consisting of archival photos, local stories and historic maps, paintings, 3d-scanned artefacts, sound recordings, and inventories of both the belongings of the artist and his family, and of the vegetation on his lands, the digital construction is a knowledge-model containing all the material pertaining to this part of the artist's life. As such, of central interest for the study is how to communicate interpretative practices to the user, balancing an incomplete source material with the need to create a space that can inspire affect.


Self portraits by Ivar Arosenius, and the mythologized landscape of Älvängen.

Building the reconstruction on top of archival material.

Time-of-day calculations to contextualize photos.

Experimentation with various graphical styles through which to reconstruct the home and garden of Ivar Arosenius. The incomplete, and insecure, source material is reflected in the reconstruction through various markers, but to create a space that can inspire affect these markers also need to be subtle.

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 a translation of bits into context. It is 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 bringing it together with the site of its origin. In the study, we frame the act of digitally reconstructing a site as an iterative research method of investigation and translation between different media, that allows a disparate material to be collected, studied, and processed simultaneously. Arosenius' Älvängen is at the centre of this study as it is the locus of the art, and also the place of the life that the archive tries to represent. As such, it is the archaeo-archival embodiment of the artist's archive.
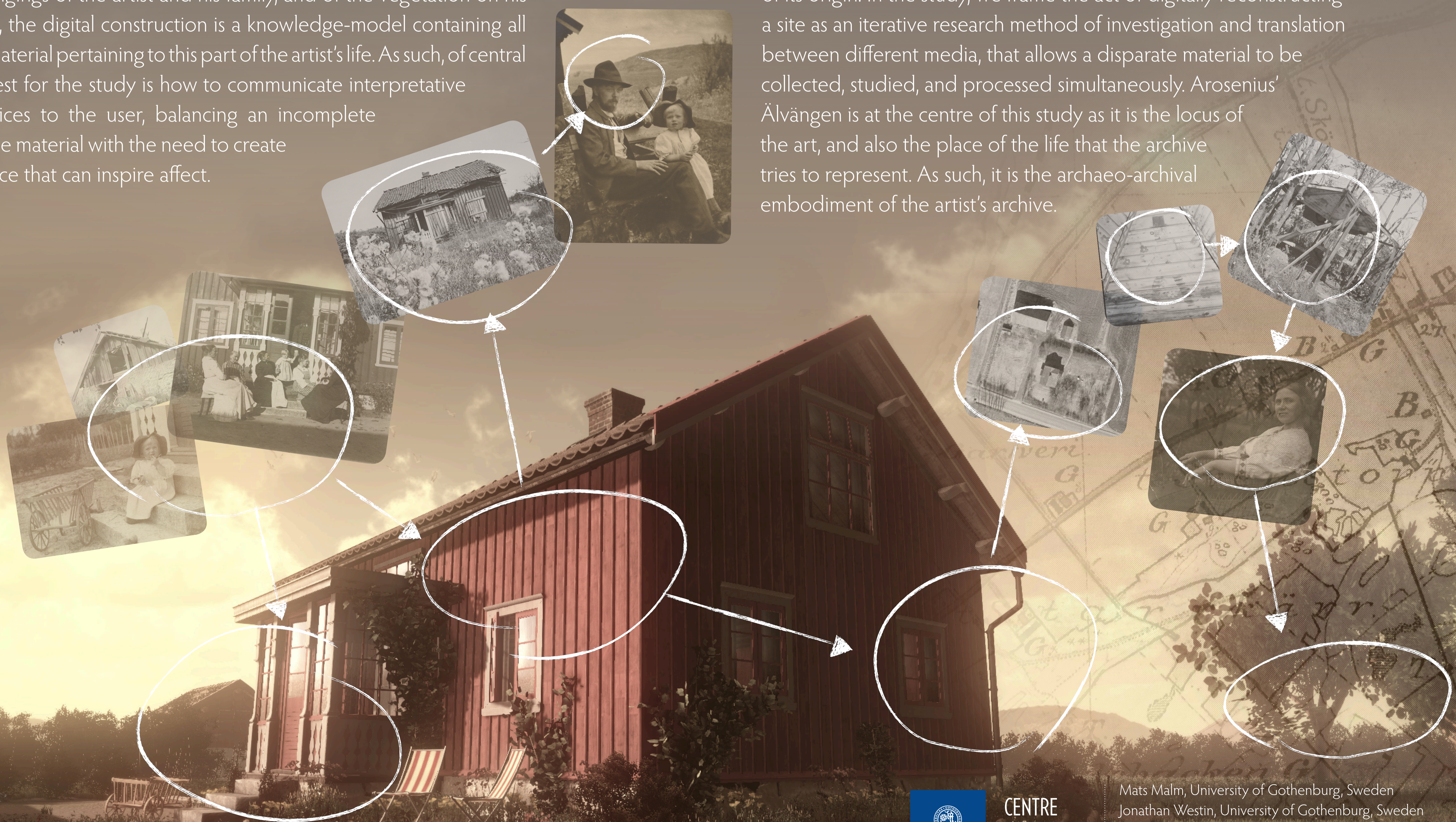
UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG
CENTRE FOR DIGITAL HUMANITIES

Mats Malm, University of Gothenburg, Sweden
Jonathan Westin, University of Gothenburg, Sweden
Dick Claésson, The Swedish Literature Bank
Cecilia Lindhé, University of Gothenburg, Sweden
Sverker Lundin, University of Gothenburg, Sweden