Artifacts originating in the area that typically hide in storage away from the public eye have now obtained a new lease on life by inspiring art and being a part of their own exhibit. Beginning Jan. 21, the Mount Airy Museum of Regional History is hosting a special exhibit entitled Art-I-Fact. The purpose of Art-I-Fact is to allow local artists to create works inspired by the museum's artifacts that aren't usually on display. Though the pieces and the art they have influenced can be viewed by the public until Feb. 11, the artists were present to show off their work and demonstrate their art on the day of the exhibit's opening. In Martin's opinion, the new exhibit is a great way for the museum to reach out to the community, adding "I love the fact that pieces are being shown that aren't normally shown and that we can get people to the museum to be inspired by art."

Present with her work inspired by a plow, saw, and a photo of a train that once ran through Mount Airy was stained glass artist Gwen Jolley. For the exhibit, Jolley devoted her talents to creating two pieces, one focused on a plow, and the other focused on a saw mill and the train. Jolley has been making stained glass for around 20 years. Each creation takes her roughly ten hours. "It's like a puzzle, but you know where the pieces go," she joked. Jolley said before she began working to create art inspired by the artifacts, she had no idea about the significance of the train in Mount Airy's history. She hopes the new exhibit draws more people to the museum to learn about the city's history through art, just as she did.

Also lending her talents to the Art-I-Fact exhibit was Glenda Edwards, a beadwork artist. As stated by Edwards, she has been doing art with beads for about 20 years after picking up the skill from Choctaw Native Americans. Edwards created a necklace by using the Cellini spiral pattern that mimics the curl of an auger found in the museum's storage. Inspired by an empty frame, Edwards also fashioned a beaded portrait of a gentlemen which hung in a similar frame. "At some point in the past that frame would have held probably the only picture of someone's family member, so to me, the frame was just as important as any artifact," Edwards reflected.

Joe Allen, a practicing blacksmith for close to ten years, focused his skills toward creating a tripod for a kettle found in museum storage and the metal outline of a horse to go along with an antique x-ray machine used for veterinary purposes. "I hope to show that there's still artists around; a lot is dying art. What I do is dying art," explained Allen, optimistic the event will be an educational experience for all members of the community, especially local children, and that it will inspire them to participate in art themselves. "Everyone has an artist in them, they just have to find it," he added.

The work of Aaron Blackwelder, who has been working with pottery since 2000, was also present. He crafted yellow dishes to complement antique kitchen furniture. The exhibit is complete with a station for kids and adults alike to make their own works of art inspired by additional artifacts there.

According to Matthew Edwards, executive director of the museum, the idea for Art-I-Fact came from a similar program held at a South Carolina museum where he worked in the past. “As with all exhibits, the goal [of Art-I-Fact] is to find new and innovative ways to capture people’s imaginations and teach them about history,” Edwards stated. The grant for the exhibit came from the North Carolina Arts Council through the Surry Arts Council, according to Amy Snyder, who serves as the museum’s curator of collections. Edwards is hopeful the museum will be able to add and expand to the program for next year. Though Jan. 21 was the last day all artists would be present together at the exhibit, each artist will be at the museum in weekends following until May to host workshops on the art of their expertise. For more information on the Art-I-Fact exhibit or the workshops hosted by the artists, call (336) 786-4478 or visit www.northcarolinamuseum.org.