



AMY BETH BENNETT/
STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

A piece from Judith Schwab's "Making Waves," a 13-sculpture work that will be on display at Gallery 17.

Artistic merger

Sculptor Judith Schwab and poet Charles Fishman collaborate in F.A.T. Village

BY DIANE C. LADE
Staff writer

Where others saw only an environmental disaster, Judith Schwab embraced an artistic opportunity.

The nonstop images of dying sea birds and soiled gulf waters after the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill were the inspiration for "Making Waves," a group of 13 sculptures by Schwab, 78, a Davie artist. They are on display at Gallery 17 in Fort Lauderdale's F.A.T. Village art district.

It was the nature-drawn work of prize-winning New York poet Charles Fishman that provided the life spark for Schwab's three-year project. His words, from 25 different poems invoking the sea, are imprinted inside each curling "wave" — large, aluminum-mesh forms covered with glowing layers of molding paste and paperlike cellulose, some embellished with feathers and shells. "What language does the earth speak?" asks one wave phrase from Fishman's poem "Speaking Island."

Fishman, whose work has



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Judith Schwab is "Making Waves" this weekend.

been nominated for the Pulitzer Prize and Pushcart Prize, will read from his work at the exhibit on Feb. 23. "Yes, the sea is a source of energy and power for me, but so are the sun and moon and the Earth itself," Fishman wrote in an email from his home on Long Island, N.Y.

Both Fishman and Schwab are passionate about nature and protecting the environment, their collaboration's center. They reconnected through shared interests for "Making Waves"

after first working together in 1990.

"Reading his poems gave me some kind of savage energy to do this monumental piece," Schwab says. "When I started, I had no idea where it would take me."

The sprawling project eventually swamped Schwab's condo lanai. Now, she has studio space in F.A.T. Village. At a time when others her age are relaxing by the pool, she's never been happier.

"That's the wonderful thing about aging," says Schwab, whose long artistic career has included exhibits overseas. "I have found balance in my life."

"Making Waves" will be on view Saturday night at Gallery 17, 17 NW Fifth St., in Fort Lauderdale. Charles Fishman will read from his poetry 9 p.m. Feb. 23 at the gallery. Admission is free. Call 954-452-4615. The exhibition will appear March 8 to April 1 at the Bakehouse Art Complex, 561 NW 32nd St., in Miami. Go to BACFL.org.