



I put my own twist on the **ART** of the deal

New York artist Sharon Loudon raised \$20,000 to finance her sculpture by offering investors a 50% return.

I was very excited when the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, in Kansas City, Mo., invited me two years ago to create a project for its main gallery. But I felt daunted, too. I needed \$20,000 to build the sculpture, and that was beyond my means.

I researched some examples of creative financing, and in November 2002 I decided to offer 100 shares, at \$200 each, in my project *The Attenders*. (The work comprises 16,105 individual pieces that are clipped together and hang from above like stalactites.)

With my husband, Vinson Valega, a jazz musician and former commodities trader, I prepared a prospectus that described my career, income

and sales record. If I sold *The Attenders* within a year, I promised to repay shareholders their principal plus a 50% return. So if you invested \$200, you would get a minimum of \$300.

The return would continue to rise with each additional year it took to sell the piece, to 150% of principal. Investors were taking the risk that I would make good on my promise. If I failed to do it within five years, I would divvy up the individual sculptures and install them in my investors' private collections.

We weren't sure how the plan would fly. But eight investors gave us the full \$20,000 in only five months.

After the exhibit at the Kemper, I approached the Progressive insurance company, which has a renowned collection of contemporary art. The company bought *The Attenders* in January 2004 and installed the sculpture in its Phoenix call center. The five-figure amount was enough for me to pay my investors.

When I told my investors that they had made at least a 50% profit in one year, they were shocked and thrilled. Some people in the art world say that selling shares is too commercial. But it's so important for an artist to be financially independent. In the next year, I'll be selling shares in an animation project that another museum has asked me to create.

With *The Attenders*, I was compensated for my labor and covered my costs, but I didn't buy any shares. Next time, I'm going to buy some shares for myself and make a profit. **K**

—AS TOLD TO SEAN O'NEILL