There is much to praise in this book. It provides needed material in an underreported area where no previous book was available. It touches upon most of the important issues and questions that have been raised about the study of the art of non-Western peoples, especially as these questions have pertained to "primitive" art. Steiner is shrewd and helpful in his appraisal of these problems. The text is laced with numerous apt photographs and is accompanied by an extensive and helpful bibliography. I shall eagerly assign it in courses I teach, especially since it is available in paperback. It is a valuable survey and appraisal of the key issues in the appropriation of non-Western art by modern Western society, especially as this involves art's commodification and marketability. It also provides a useful introduction to some important issues in the ways that artefacts attain authenticity as both economically and culturally valued objects. The teaching value of this volume is enhanced by its close association with a provocative and clever documentary film about the same African art traders, Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Taylor: "In and out of Africa."

This book’s introduction and the enthusiastic promotional blurbs on the backcover led me to expect detailed and extensive ethnographic reportage. Yet extensive quotes and detailed descriptions as to what dealers say about objects, how they determine quality (value), and how they actually relate to one another and to suppliers and buyers are all few and thin. It is difficult to get any clear idea of how dealers see their careers, how they organize resources, how they actually work from day to day. Steiner’s material is somewhat generalized and lacks a vivid sense of daily affairs that I was led to expect. Still, as a first in its field, this remains valuable.

Steiner did fieldwork for a little over a year in the Côte d’Ivoire, mainly in the capital, Abidjan, though also briefly in other towns. He provides descriptions of various kinds of sales sites, from fancy galleries to itinerant hawkers and market stands, of suppliers ranging from unsophisticated upcountry villagers to artisans who mass produce for the tourist trade to Europeans secretly reselling to the very traders from whom they had originally purchased items. He describes strategies of display, forms of competition, bargaining, sales talk, pricing, and more.

Steiner concludes his study by emphasizing the cultural factors influencing aesthetic evaluation. In doing so, he rightly indicates that purported aesthetic value of objects is generally equated with monetary value, and that both are the products of the pronouncements by a small number of experts who dominate the market by establishing and maintaining rules of taste. These arbiters are almost exclusively non-Africans whose arguments and motives appear alien to the thinking or control of African traders. Even those very Africans who actually created the art objects are generally discounted in determining such criteria of value. African traders do appear to exert considerably more control over local tourists, but such purchases involve far lower economic stakes.

Criteria of quality and value are imposed in all
fields of art evaluation but are especially vague and precarious in the sphere of "primitive" or "folk" art where as yet the domains and criteria set by experts are still poorly sustained by any common traditions or even information. In any case, art everywhere resists the imposition of easily determined canons acceptable to all. It involves a system of changing and contested values defined and determined by a powerful elite of dealers, scholars, and exhibitors. This applies to all realms of art, European and African, ancient and modern, painting and furniture. Students of more established art markets, such as those for European and Oriental arts, recognize that trends are constantly manipulated and subject to innovations and vogues. The sheer hunger to consume (and vend) steadily enlarges the domains of what may be considered art or valuables, with ever newer forms being defined as prized "collectibles," for example, in America, baseball cards (now exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum), comic books, art-deco furnishings, and jewelry. Steiner briefly mentions how such new trends may also be set for African arts, such as the growing interest in previously disdained colonial and transitional Baule figurines or in "newly discovered" ethnic genres as demonstrated by recent attempts by dealers to promote east-central Tanzanian carvings (see my review in Anthropros 86.1991: 606--609). Changes and competition in scholarship, market manipulation, and other factors all figure in this. In African art, age and original use (not made for sale) figure especially prominently.

One reason why African art traders have not been better studied, or, indeed, that the topics of authenticity, pricing, and trends in marketability (and exhibition) have not been better reported and analyzed is the close connexion between the study of African art and the influence of both dealers and collectors in Europe and America. Such rich and influential figures dominate much of the museum and exhibition world inhabited by art scholars who, in turn, are also often themselves deeply involved in the economics of attribution, sales, and collecting. This also involves publishing since the appearance of objects in exhibition catalogues and books raises values. Yet scholars as well as dealers seem determined to downplay the deep economic stakes in their work, a fact that Steiner would have done well to have noted even more forcefully. Perhaps the best feature of Steiner's volume is his persistent connecting of European scholarly conventions about aesthetics with the issues of money and marketability. Art is a topic about which many vague and obfuscating writings appear. However elevated art may appear in idealistic terms, art remains grounded in everyday, working social organizations and relations requiring the same social analyses appropriate to other spheres. If art involves social organization and social interaction, then it also involves authority, power, and economics, yet such factors are often thought to be inappropriate and sullying to such supposedly elevated fare.

Many of the objects traded as African art are beautiful and provide inspiration and pleasure for many. Yet such art, all art, is also the stuff of business, profit, loss, and speculation. Steiner's volume represents a useful contribution to demystifying some of the previous writings on African art, and the sociological study of art in general.

T. O. Beideman


The book grew out of a thesis based on fieldwork in a fishing village in the northwestern province of Sri Lanka. The Hindu Karaiyar caste mostly practising beach seine fishing is politically and economically dominant in the village. The purpose of the study has been to show the interplay of the patrons' political power and the personal as well as cosmological meanings of the rituals sponsored by them.

In the introduction, the author reviews the anthropological literature on Hinduism with special regard to functional and ideological holism. He strongly disagrees with Dumont's emphasis on purity and pollution and equally criticizes Wadley's claim that the essence of Hindu deities is power. The reviewer can only agree since she has repeatedly pointed out that Hinduism has prototypical elements but no defining essence. Power, for instance, cannot define Hindu gods since gods anywhere have power. Besides, even the most powerful god would be of little use to his pragmatic devotees if he could not be induced to help.

After presenting village temples, deities, ritual specialists, rituals, and patrons the author goes on to discuss devotion and possession. Possession may be more or less controlled according to the divine or demonic possessing agent. Villagers take vows to perform rites of thanksgiving (nērtti-k-kaṭan, not nerri = forehead) if they obtain the desired boon. Such rites typically include the carrying of two milk pots under a pole for men, the carrying of one milk pot on the head for women, and firewalking. Main reasons for taking vows are illness and the lack of offspring.

The core of the book consists in the analysis of the two major festivals celebrated in the village: the Bhadrakāli festival and the Draupadi festival. As elsewhere, Bhadrakāli is an epidemic goddess, but in Sri Lanka, rather than a form of Śiva's wife Pārvatī, she is considered the divine couple's second daughter. Fierce deities in general are said to be the great gods' offspring or affines, and not their alter egos. The Bhadrakāli festival is characterized by the sacrifice of a goat to the goddess herself and four cocks to evil spirits. Attendants of the goddess suck blood from the neck of the decapitated birds. For goddess Pécci, believed to be Bhadrakāli's younger sister who dislikes blood, a cock is impaled, a torture that it miraculously survives. As stated by the villagers themselves, blood sacrifice serves to obtain the protection of the goddess, i.e., it is a means of pleasing or propitiating her. The author, however, as a member of the deeper meaning school of thought, is not content with this plausible interpretation. According to him, the sacrificial goat "is actually Bhadrakāli's devotee hus-

Anthropos 89.1994