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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK BODY OF WORK

Young Jean Lee is a thirty-six-year-old Korean-American playwright and director who makes theatre out of the ways the culture affects her imagination. Her plays address, among other things, what it means to own a self-hating body.



While she shows how Asian women, blacks, and gays take on societal negativity, she's never didactic about it. She's too wise, and has too much of a sense of humor to preach about what others have no way of feeling: difference. Some of Lee's characters live in the heart of a fake reality; they're bright theatrical flies stuck in some strange ointment that they can't seem to free themselves of—but who among us is free? Artists mostly, which Lee is. Now she's tackling what directors rarely do: a live performance starring herself. In "We're Gonna Die" (at Joe's Pub through April 30), Lee puts her money where her dramaturgical mouth is. By assuming the role of performer, Lee is taking on the kamikaze-like vulnerability that comes with making your body the central text, thus writing another chapter in her vital and necessary work.

—Hilton Als
