



John Quilty

ASHLIE ATKINSON There are two plausible explanations for why Ms. Atkinson could be cast as the title character in Neil LaBute's "Fat Pig" in 2004 and then follow that acclaimed performance by playing the ultimate sex symbol, Marilyn Monroe, in "Making Marilyn." The first is that the ideal body type of movie stars and models has slimmed down so radically in the last few decades that Monroe would now be considered too well padded. The other is that Ms. Atkinson, above, is just a wonderful actress. Certainly, her heartbreaking turn opposite Jeremy Piven last year did a beautiful job of illustrating the multiple lines of defense built up by an emotionally bruised woman before the actress, devastatingly, stripped them away. Ms. Atkinson found a romantic core to the cruel world of Mr. LaBute, and for that impressive trick she was rewarded with rave reviews and nominations for the Lucille Lortel and the Outer Critics Circle awards. As for her new piece, which runs only through Dec. 8, some may wonder if we need another play about Marilyn Monroe. (The last one, "The Marilyn Tapes," opened in October.) But this new memory play by the Canadian writer Ken Cameron, produced by the Bridge Theater Company, does not cover familiar ground. It focuses on an unlikely friendship between Monroe and a lonely teenager that develops while Monroe is filming "River of No Return" in the early 1950's. Superficially, it may seem as if Ms. Atkinson is taking on a very different part but, knowing Monroe's tragic life, don't be surprised to find that the two insecure, lonely and sensual women have more in common than you think. ("Making Marilyn" opens on Wednesday at Theater 54, 244 West 54th Street, 12th floor, Manhattan, (212) 868-4444; \$15.)

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