

SMELL THE LIGHT

EVERY MOVIEMAKER LIVES FOR THE DAY his or her work appears on the big screen. So it's no surprise that Adam Linn, a 33-year-old director from New York, is overjoyed each time his short is shown to audiences. The thing that makes Linn stand out from the crowd of first-time directors jockeying for attention is something else entirely: Adam Linn is blind.

Linn wrote, directed and stars in the eight-minute short, *Smell the Light*. His achievement is incredibly inspirational given the fact that he succeeded with this movie at all, but especially because he succeeded in spite of his blindness. What makes this story even more remarkable is the fact that Linn has created a film so visually distinct that you'd swear it could only have been created by a person who sees things quite clearly.

Linn does not agree. "David Mamet once said this thing that stuck with me, which is that you don't have to have vision to direct a film, just imagination," he says. "You create a film in your mind."

Smell the Light, which has been screened at the Boston International Film Festival, the Coney Island Film Festival and the Woods Hole Film Festival (where it won Best Experimental Short), is not the simplest of films to describe. In fact, it requires multiple viewings before all of its complex strands fall into place. The protagonist is Manfred (played by Linn), a blind yoga student who does verbal battle in an empty yoga studio with Godfrey, his chatterbox Mafioso alter ego (played by blind actor George Ashiotis).

The film is a mix of drama, mystery, noir, existentialism and the avant-garde. It is an extremely *visual* experience, shot in a Manhattan yoga studio with shafts of light

piercing curtain-shrouded windows where puffs of cigar smoke float through the air. The visceral nature of the film's ambiance is startling, and even shocking when one discovers that the director has been unable to see since the age of 11.

"One of my goals as a filmmaker is to get audiences to really see what's going on and to actually absorb some visual data, which is why I use long takes," says Linn.

"In *Smell the Light*, people always comment on the green couch that Godfrey is sitting on. But if people walked by that couch in real life, I can guarantee they would not

technical consultant for Bob Hoskins on the set of Marc Forster's *Stay*.

Over a period of three months, Linn spent a total of two weeks on location in New York with Forster, listening in on the headphones and asking Forster to explain why he made certain decisions. Linn says Forster was generous with his time and happy to talk about moviemaking and his respect for great directors like Alfred Hitchcock.

"I took a huge lesson away from him," says Linn. "He worked in a very organic way. He really worked the space into the film and he tried to make a minimal amount of changes



No vision, just imagination: Adam Linn (l) and George Ashiotis in the award-winning short film, *Smell the Light*.

comment on it. It's only when you direct the camera toward something and leave it there that people can really appreciate it. The time allows the actors to breathe and it allows the audience to look at what is there."

Linn has gleaned many of his moviemaking ideas from working on sets. He appeared in Sophie Goodhart's short film *My Blind Brother*, a finalist at Cannes in 2003, and in the HBO series "Sex and the City." But one of Linn's most inspirational moments came last year when he was invited to work as a

to the location where he was shooting.

"I did the same with *Smell the Light*. That couch and curtains that people comment on were not brought in by us, they were already there. The fact that the space wasn't tampered with gives the scene harmony."

It took Linn almost four months to write the script for *Smell the Light*, which he penned while studying film at New York University. He gives much of the credit to his co-producer, Jim Phinney, with whom he formed Good Look Productions.

NEIL BECKERMAN

