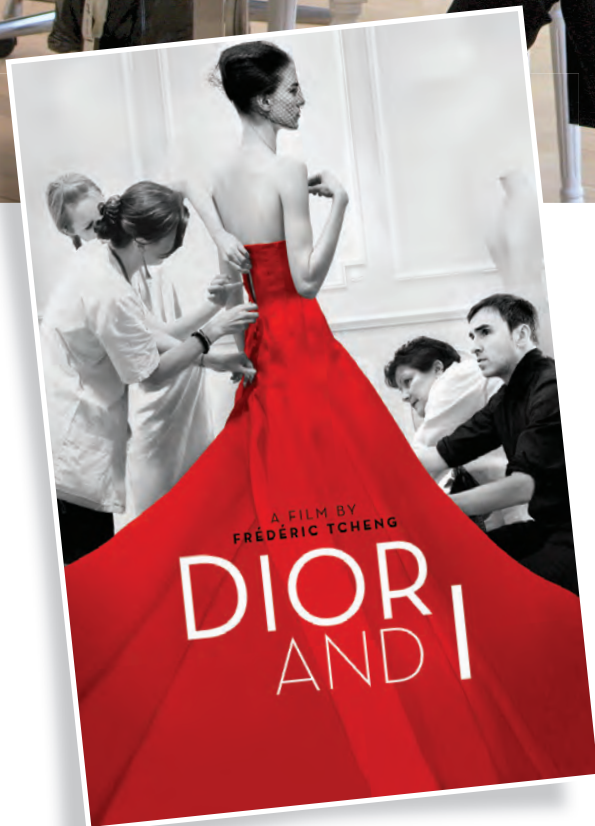


Former Dior artistic director Raf Simons in a scene from the documentary *Dior and I*.



A Fashionable Man

Frédéric Tcheng's documentary *Dior and I* goes inside the hallowed fashion house



he first time filmmaker **Frédéric Tcheng** saw his subject **Raf Simons** was through the lens of a Canon C300 as work began on Tcheng's documentary *Dior and I*. Dior's former artistic director and the filmmaker were both more comfortable meeting that way than with a handshake.

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Simons' team (above), as featured in *Dior and I* working on the fashion house's fall/winter 2012 collection in Paris (right).



"I sent Raf, who was a total stranger to me, a letter in April 2012," says Tcheng, sitting in his brownstone in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood. "I asked him if he would consider being the subject of a documentary about the house of Dior and his new role there. He was very apprehensive and agreed to only a one-week trial period. When he walked into the room in Paris a week later, I saw him from behind my camera."

Over an eight-week period, during which Simons had to create a haute couture collection for the venerable French brand, Tcheng documented Simons' professional role as well as his personality and the complex anatomy of his creative process. *Dior and I* debuted at the Tribeca Film Festival in April 2014 and began to appear on screens worldwide in spring 2015—and unlike a fashion fad, the award-winning film, now available for downloading, endures as a staple of the art of documentary and a tribute to Simons' tenure at Dior, which ended in October.

The 37-year-old Tcheng, born and raised in Lyon, France, is also known for co-directing 2011's *The Eye Has to Travel*, a documentary about **Diana Vreeland**, and for co-editing and co-producing 2009's *Valentino: The Last Emperor*, about **Valentino**. Although Tcheng describes his parents as always supportive, he recounts growing up "with nobody around me doing anything even remotely creative." As a boy, he visited his local library and borrowed the films on its shelves. "One week, I would watch everything by **Kubrick**, the next every film by **Scorsese**."

He earned a degree in engineering, but upon moving to Paris and working odd jobs in the film industry, he discerned a new plotline for himself. "I applied to film schools, and when I was accepted at Columbia and came to New York, I knew the city was the place to reinvent myself as a filmmaker."

"I don't think I've yet found my voice—if I had, I'd have stopped making films. There's so much I still want to achieve."

Even though Tcheng is now regarded as one of the best chroniclers of the world of fashion, he insists, "My making films about fashion is just a phase. The point for me is to grow as a filmmaker, and fashion is a means to explore different sides of my personality. I'm interested in artists and people who have strong ideas like Raf, who thrives on dialogue, conversation and collaboration."

Although Tcheng's film is a narrative documentary, it has the momentum, plot twists, conflicts and realized characters more typical of a narrative film. He is writing a script now for what he calls

"a fictional story that has documentary elements to it." Although he won't yet reveal its subject, Tcheng says, "It's about an artist trying to find his voice. I don't think I've yet found my voice—if I had, I'd have stopped making films. There's so much I still want to achieve."

— David Masello