

# PRESS KIT



**ITEM 7**  
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# MARCO & POLO GO ROUND

AVAILABLE IN VR EXPERIENCE AND 2D ANIMATED FILM

DIRECTED BY BENJAMIN STEIGER LEVINE

## FESTIVALS & AWARDS FOR 2D ANIMATED FILM

Clermont-Ferrand Film Festival 2022  
International Short Film Festival In The Palace 2022

## FESTIVALS & AWARDS FOR THE VR

### AWARDS

Stereopsia EUROPE 2021 - Best Creative XR - Crystal Owl Awards  
Kaohsiung XR Dreamland 2021 - VR Golden Fireball Award  
FNC Explore 2021 - Most Innovative 6DOF  
360VR Festival 2021 - Best VR Short Film Award  
GIFFMX 2021 - Mejor Narrativa Visual de Realidad Virtual

### FESTIVALS 2021

Stereopsia EUROPE 2021 - Crystal Owl Awards  
GIFF 2021 - Territoires Virtuels - International Competition  
Kaohsiung XR Dreamland 2021 - VR Competition  
VRE FEST 2021 - VR Interactive  
FNC Explore 2021 - VR Projects - Horizon  
Bolton Film Festival 2021 - VR & 360  
360VR Festival 2021 - Competition  
GIFFMX 2021 - Animation  
FEFFS Strasbourg 2021 - VR Corner  
Sandbox 2021 - Selection  
BIFAN 2021 Beyond Reality - Official Selection  
Tribeca Immersive 2021 - Virtual Arcade  
NewImages 2021 - XR Competition

## DESCRIPTION

Genre: Animation, romantic comedy  
Formats: VR: Narrative fiction VR 6DoF  
Animated film in 2D  
Duration VR: 12 minutes  
Duration 2D: 14 minutes  
Language: English, French  
Year: 2021

[www.item7.ca](http://www.item7.ca)

Countries: Canada, Belgium  
URL: marcoandpologoround.com

## TECHNOLOGY

- 3D Scan and 3D reconstruction of the actors
- On stage Mocap in 1:1 scale physical recreated environment
- Rigid and soft body simulations
- Experience rendered real time in Unreal Engine

## PLATFORMS VR

- VR Headset wired on local PC
- Strong PC recommended

## FILM 2D

- The film is also available in 2D version (14 minutes)

## CONTACTS

### Producers, sales and festival for the 2D animated film

Jeannette Garcia – ITEM 7  
+ 1 514-526-2772 / jgarcia@item7.ca

### Media

Mélanie Mingotaud – Communications Mingo2  
+1-514 582 5272 / melanie@mingo2.ca

### Sales and Festivals for **VR experience**

Paul Bouchard – Diversion cinema  
+33 6 26 62 63 00 / paul@diversioncinema.com



## NOTES ON VIRTUAL REALITY

Marco & Polo Go Round is an immersive love story. The narrative VR experience was produced using volumetric captures of actors driven by live action motion capture as well as traditional animation and physics simulations



## LOGLINE

A simple parable about love takes a surreal turn when a young couple's life is quite literally turned upside-down

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

*Marco & Polo Go Round* is a comedic love story with a very surreal twist. A couple confronts the difficulties in their relationship as gravity turns on its head and their world literally falls apart around them.

## LONG SYNOPSIS

On the morning of his birthday, Marco (Emmanuel Schwartz) discovers the cake Polo (Léane Labrèche-Dor) has lovingly made and left for him on the kitchen table. He also notices that every object in the kitchen has been battened down with tape and twine as if to safeguard against an oncoming storm. What begins as a beautiful morning for the young couple takes a surreal turn when their world literally falls apart around them.

## TEAM

Writers: Gregory Kaufman & Benjamin Steiger Levine

Director: Benjamin Steiger Levine

Producers: Audrey Pacart, Paul-E. Audet, Pierre Even, ITEM 7 - Canada

Co-Producer: Alain-Gilles Viellevoye, BELGA PRODUCTIONS - Belgium

Built by: DPT

Creative Director: Nicolas S. Roy

Chief of Innovation: Hugues Bruyère

Experience Director & Lead 3D Artist: Samuel Walker

Sound Designer: François Fripiat

Original Music: Yves Gourmeur

Editing and publication on VR / 360° platforms (Europe): ARTE France

[www.item7.ca](http://www.item7.ca)

International Sales: Diversion cinema for the VR, ITEM 7 for the 2D animated film

## MEET THE CAST



Léane Labrèche-Dor is



**POLO**



# BENJAMIN STEIGER LEVINE

Director, screenwriter

## BIOGRAPHY



Benjamin Steiger Levine portrays experience through unexpected stories that are both touching and unsettling. This balance between charm and discomfort, humanity and visual wonder is the heart of his work. Ben's favorite films contain images and ideas that come from a personal place but which have been transposed to unexpected visual worlds populated by unforgettable characters. Ben was featured as a Best New Director at the Cannes Lions International Advertising Festival. He has been named a Young Gun by the Art Directors Club of New York, nominated for best music video at the Grammys and received Cannes Lions for his work in advertising. He has finally made the plunge into narrative and immersive storytelling with the VR experience Marco & Polo Go Round and the development of his first feature Fox Blood.

## SHORT BIO

Benjamin Steiger Levine portrays experience through unexpected stories that are both touching and unsettling. This balance between charm and discomfort, humanity and visual wonder is the heart of his work. Ben's favorite stories come from a personal place that get expressed in unexpected visual ways.

## PRESS NOTES

### QUESTIONS TO BENJAMIN STEIGER LEVINE

#### ***What makes you unique?***

I strive to create stories that are both fantastical and honest. I want to transport the user to a place they've never been before while conveying something that is emotionally true.

#### ***What are three things you'd like viewer to take away from experiencing your project?***

- To meditate on the nature of love while riding a roller coaster.
- To get lost in a visceral, emotional experience for adults.
- To ask, "how did they do that?"

#### ***What technology are you using in your current project?***

The complexity of this project is that it flows in real time within one uninterrupted scene. We used volumetric capture of actors, driven by live action motion capture as well as traditional animation and physics simulations to construct our experience. All these elements are created in a variety of film pipeline programs

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which are usually destined for 2D screenings. Ingesting this data in one long sequence into *Unreal*, a video game engine, which allows for 6dof created many challenges. To create this type of immersive storytelling requires constant innovation.

***Tell us about the sound design and original music in your project.***

The process was exciting and challenging. The sense of chaos in our experience, though visual, comes to life through sound design. A great amount of care and attention went into modeling each and every sound and then manipulating these to create dramatic tensions. How these sounds are then placed in a binaural space plays a huge role in directing the user's attention.

Music emphasizes the unspoken emotions between our two characters. The story is about people who care deeply for each other but who are ultimately unable to look past their own fears to connect. As opposed to reflecting the emotions that play out on screen, music reflects the hidden emotions that the characters cannot articulate. Music becomes a character, expressing the sadness, fear, love that our heroes do not know how to communicate.

***In the creation of your project, was the development team inspired by any artists or other existing bodies of work?***

The story is rather personal but inspired by the works of more surrealist filmmakers that I love such as Charlie Kaufman, Ingmar Bergman and Hayaho Miyazaki.

Aesthetically, we knew we would not be able to create something photorealistic in a game engine and became very inspired by the work of certain painters. We looked to painters who use bold colors and strong strokes to create very human pieces. David Hockney's portrait series was perhaps the strongest influence.

***Did creating in a time of a pandemic influence your project at all?***

It did slow things down a lot. Everyone worked remotely off servers instead of in one office and communications which could sometimes take a few minutes required coordinated Zoom sessions. On the other hand, it permitted individual "deep dives" on certain artistic aspects of the project which ultimately led to beautiful things.

***What inspired you to create Marco & Polo Go Round?***

For years, images of a sun-drenched kitchen slowly coming apart as gravity mysteriously turned on its head kept playing through my mind. I began to realize the kitchen in my mind looked a lot like the one I shared with my first girlfriend, a person who I loved in ways that were not realistic and who ultimately broke my heart. And so, Marco and Polo's adventure was born, inspired by intimate lived experiences that play out in a world where gravity is coming apart.

To explore the beauty, mystery, heartache of love in the context of a dreamlike, visceral, action sequence seemed unique to me. My hope is that Marco & Polo Go Round introduces adult audiences to VR content that is a physical thrill ride as well as emotionally honest and fulfilling.

***How did the project come together?***

When I first experienced VR I instantly knew Marco & Polo Go Round had to be told in this medium. I wanted the experience of love to be totally intimate and the sensation of gravity turning on its head to be completely immersive.

Audrey Pacart , producer, loved the script and was passionate about immersive and new media projects. She brought the project to Item 7 and we then submitted it to the Venice Film Festival Financing Bridge. After raising money, we created fantastic partnerships with DPT, the amazing company that built and designed the experience as well as talented animators, musicians and sound designers in Europe.

***This is your first time directing a VR film? What has this process been like for you?***

It's been an exhilarating and an insane challenge. What I love about cinema is its ability to transport a viewer to an imagined reality. Whether it is a place that is fantastical or that represents the real world, it is always essentially a place born in a creator's mind. VR takes that concept of 'transporting the viewer' to a far more profound and complete place. With Marco & Polo Go Round we were not creating frames and shots but a complete universe full of rich details. The process of building every inch of that universe was extremely creatively rewarding.

But that process posed huge challenges. Every creative decision had to be managed from a 360 degree perspective and VR technology is still essentially in its infancy. On a tech level, we basically took all the highest end techniques used in the film world and had to combine them with techniques used in the immersive video game world. The problem is that these various industry standard programs are literally not designed to communicate with each other. Combining these two workflows into one pipeline required constant innovation.

***Can you briefly take us through the story or give us a bit of a logline in your own words?***

Marco & Polo Go Round is a comedic love story with a very surreal twist. The user is invited to participate in a couple's relationship as gravity gets turned on its head and their world literally falls apart around them.

***Can you tell us a bit about the two characters and how you cast Emmanuel and Léane?***

Marco and Polo are perfectly complementary characters. They are totally different but these differences make up for what the other lacks. These differences also drive them apart. Marco takes his time, is thoughtful, believes truth only exists in a space that is grey. Polo is a fireball and, for her, truth means speaking one's opinion loudly and clearly.

Emmanuel and Léane, apart from being extremely talented and generous actors who elevated the project, somehow captured these different aspects or the characters' personalities. Emmanuel has a depth, a reserve, a quiet wisdom to his soul that glimmers just beneath the surface. Léane is that kind of person who without even knowing it infuses everything with light. She walks into a space and within two minutes everyone in the room starts to smile and feel happy.

They both came highly recommended from the production team at Item 7. As soon as they came on board I knew the characters and the project itself would come to life.

***What is your favorite memory from on set?***

I can't honestly say I have one memory. What I hold most dear about this experience is how everyone on the team came together to create something more compelling and beautiful than any one of us could have imagined individually. This is a rare thing and it happened on Marco Polo. That part of the creative process is really special. It makes me feel connected to others, less lonely, purposeful in a way that no other experience can.



# ACTOR'S BIOGRAPHIES

## Léane Labrèche-Dor, Actress, POLO

Since graduating from National Theater School, Léane Labrèche-Dor has stepped on many stages: that of the Jean-Duceppe Theatre in *Les muses orphelines*, of the Espace Go in the play *Villa Dolorosa*, and of the Theatre d'Aujourd'hui, in Annick Lefebvre's creation *J'accuse*. From 2016 to 2019, she travels around Quebec with the show *On t'aime Mickaël Gouin*.

On television, Léane played Charlène in *30 vies*, on Radio-Canada, and Fanny in *Camping de l'Ours*, broadcast on VRAK. She was also one of the regulars in the very popular sketch show *SNL Québec* (Télé-Québec) and its sequel, *Le Nouveau Show* (SRC and Tou.tv). Léane is one of the four headliners of the comedy series *Les Magnifiques*, on Radio-Canada, she also takes on the role of Camille the psychologist in *Cérébrum*, Richard Blaimert's new series. She worked on multiple web projects such as *Sylvain, le magnifique*, *7\$ par jour*, *Le Frigidaire* and *La règle de 3*. She also co-hosted *La vie n'est pas un magazine*, joined by Catherine Trudeau. Léane also took part of several feature films including Julie Hivon's *Qu'est ce qu'on fait ici (What Are We Doing Here?)*, Guillaume Lambert's *Les scènes fortuites*, and Sophie Dupuis' critically acclaimed *Chien de Garde (Family First)*. In 2020, Léane holds the lead role in the feature film *Le Rire (Laughter)*, directed by Martin Laroche, and is nominated at the Québec Cinéma Gala for her performance. She is also part of the cast of *Escouade 99*, a French language adaptation of the popular American show, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, available on Club Illico.

## Emmanuel Schwartz, Actor, MARCO

Intense and polymorphic performer, Emmanuel Schwartz travels with ease between the stage and the screen. From *Tartuffe* to *Alexandre (UBU, Denis Marleau)*, *Caligula* to *Achille (TDH, Marc Beaupré)*, with his many collaborations with Wajdi Mouawad (*ABécarréCécarré, Littoral, Forêts, Ciels*) and Mani Soleymanlou (*Orange Noyée, UN, DEUX, TROIS, HUIT*), his strong presence radiates both in technique and in depth. In between creating his own projects for the stage as both actor and director (*Chroniques, Nathan, L'Exhibition, Théâtre Lachapelle, CNA, FTA, CTDA*) Emmanuel Schwartz receives the award for Best Actor in the web series *L'Écrivain Public* at Marseille's Festiweb in 2015 and at the Gémeaux in 2020. In 2016, he is nominated by the ACAD for his interpretation of Lucky in *Waiting for Godot*, directed by François Girard. He is awarded that same price the following year for his *Tartuffe*. He returns to the stage of the Espace Go in 2020 for *Soifs Matériaux* and of the TNM for his solo *Zébrina*.

He is introduced to the big screen with Xavier Dolan, Denis Villeneuve, Mathieu Denis (*Laurence Anyways, Next Floor, Laurentie*). He develops a range of fascinating characters in 7 Quebec feature films, including *Hochelaga, terre des âmes (Hochelaga, Land of Souls)* by François Girard (Best supporting actor at Quebec's Iris Awards), *Ailleurs (Nowhere)* by Samuel Mateau, *Dérive (The Far Shore)* by David Uloth, *Nous sommes Gold (We Are Gold)* by Éric Morin, *Impetus* by Jennifer Ayleen and *The Twentieth Century* by Matthew Rankin. On television, we have seen him in *Nos étés, Les jeunes loups, Blue Moon, Trop* and *Lâcher prise*. He also joins the cast of *Virage*, the new dramatic series on Noovo.

# PRODUCERS

## AUDREY PACART

Creative producer and consultant in immersive content, Audrey Pacart produces narrative works in VR and AR. As a consultant, she assists producers, creators and international institutions in the writing, production, creation and distribution of works combining narrative and new technologies. Audrey also works as an associate programmer at TRIBECA IMMERSIVE. After having directed programming, content and digital strategy for Group V Media (Canada) and TOU.TV (Canada) one of the first OTT platform where she has developed and produced numerous web series, she now has expertise in the strategy, development, launch and management of digital platforms related to the media and culture industry as well as in content development. She has been a line producer for more than 15 years on TV series, feature films and documentaries.

## PAUL-E. AUDET

Paul-Emmanuel Audet has been working in television, film and digital production for nearly fifteen years. After first making his mark as an independent producer with several short films earning praise on the film festival circuit, he joins Cirrus Communications which would later become Attraction Images. During his nine-year tenure, he worked on dozens of productions in a wide variety of genre and scale, from mobile apps, to international co-productions, documentaries, TV series and feature films, being mostly involved in financing, distribution and legal and business affairs. In the spring of 2018, after a stint at Urbania and Sphere Media Plus, he rejoins at Item 7 his colleagues of the early days.

Paul-Emmanuel Audet holds a Bachelor of Communication from Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) (2001), a Certificate in Business Law from Université de Montréal (2009) and a Master of Business Administration (MBA) from HEC Montréal (2016). He also graduated from the Cinema Producer Program at the Institut National de l'Image et du Son (INIS) (2004).

## PIERRE EVEN

The film LIFE BEGINS from Michel Monty launches Item 7 in 2009. The first three productions – the other two being Jean-Marc Vallée's CAFÉ DE FLORE and Kim Nguyen's WAR WITCH (REBELLE)– receive a great public and critical reception and also win several nominations or prestigious awards, including a nomination for the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film for WAR WITCH.

Pierre Even distinguished himself with three co-productions – BROOKLYN, A Kid, and BON COP BAD COP 2 – all of which have had great success at the box office in Quebec or abroad. Brooklyn has also received several prestigious nominations at the

Academy Awards, Golden Globes, the British Academy of Film and Television Arts and the Canadian Screen Awards. Pierre proposes in 2019 its most ambitious production to date, THE HUMMINGBIRD PROJECT, which sees him reconnect for the third time with the director Kim Nguyen, starring Jesse Eisenberg, Alexander Skarsgård and Salma Hayek. In theaters in 2021, BEST SELLERS a first feature film by Lina Roessler starring Michael Caine and Aubrey Plaza, which had its premiere at Berlinale, MARIA CHAPDELAINÉ written and directed by Sébastien Pilote, and MARCO & POLO GO ROUND Item 7's first foray in virtual reality.

Pierre Even has produced more than thirty films, including C.R.A.Z.Y. directed by Jean-Marc Vallée: released in 2005, won 51 international prizes and was sold in 85 countries, NITRO directed by Alain DesRochers: released in the summer of 2007 in Québec, the film grossed 1.2 million in its opening weekend, beating all Hollywood blockbusters.

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# PRODUCTION COMPANIES

## ITEM 7

Item 7 is a Montreal-based film production company led by Pierre Even. Since its inception in 2009, Item 7 has produced 17 feature films including Jean-Marc Vallée's CAFÉ DE FLORE, Academy Award® nominated films WAR WITCH (REBELLE) by Kim Nguyen and, co-production BROOKLYN by John Crowley starring Saoirse Ronan. Recent films released include Kim Nguyen's THE HUMMINGBIRD PROJECT starring Jesse Eisenberg, Alexander Skarsgard. In 2021, Lina Roessler's first feature film BEST SELLERS had its premiere at Berlinale. The Canada-UK co-production is starring Michael Caine and Aubrey Plaza. In theaters in Fall 2021 is MARIA CHAPDELAINÉ written and directed by Sébastien Pilote and, the short VR film MARCO & POLO GO ROUND, Item 7's first foray in virtual reality.  
[www.Item7.ca](http://www.Item7.ca)

## BELGA PRODUCTIONS

Belga Productions specializes in assisting European film co-productions that complete part or all of their production process in Belgium (principal photography, post-production, special effects). For instance, in 2015 and 2016, Belga Productions provided co-production and production services to several large-scale international film projects, such as Thomas Vinterberg's 'Kursk', EuropaCorp's 'Renegades' or Roman Polanski's 'Based on a true story'. Belga Productions also assisted several local productions in their production and financing efforts, including applying and obtaining local regional funds. Thanks to its ties with Belga Films Fund and the Belga Films group, the largest independent film distributor in the Benelux, Belga Productions offers an unparalleled one-stop shopping solution for European producers considering Belgium as a production location: financing via its in-house Tax Shelter fund, Benelux distribution (including TV output deal), production services, application to regional funds, etc.

# DISTRIBUTION COMPANIES FOR THE VR ONLY

## DIVERSION CINEMA

Diversion cinema has been experimenting with Virtual Reality (VR) since 2016 while welcoming visitors into its VR theater every Saturday. In 2018, Diversion cinema opens a distribution department to promote immersive experiences internationally. As a partner to the world's most prestigious festivals, Diversion cinema has developed expertise in VR space creation, including technical tests to mediation, technical support to scenography, logistics and more.  
[www.diversioncinema.com](http://www.diversioncinema.com)

## ARTE

VR production and digital distribution

The European channel ARTE has been co-producing digital works, including virtual reality programs (360° and 6DOF), since 2015. The most of them have met with international recognition and success: this is notably the case of Notes on blindness, the ARTE Trips collection, Gloomy Eyes VR, BattleScar. The channel is pursuing a policy of publishing and distributing VR content and video games for dedicated platforms, in line with an editorial strategy that with an editorial strategy that focuses on the points of view of singular authors, on narratives / new forms of storytelling and on innovation.

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