STEVE ZAFEIRIOU
New Media Artist, Technologist,
Founder Saphire Labs

Belief engines.

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Welcome.

Since you are holding this artwork booklet and reading these words, Steve is trusting you with his very identity: his brand.

The following pages are full of information about Steve Zafeiriou' interactive sculpture titled "Belief engines", that he hopes will help you understand his values, world views, vision, and reinforce his brand.

Sincerely, welcome to "Belief Engines" artwork research.

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About the lab.

Autonomous ******** Computational Systems Interactive Installations ************and more.**

Saphire Labs is a research & development laboratory powering human-centric technology by prototyping physical & digital systems, SaaS, tools, & interactive experiences. We believe that human-centred methodologies grounded in empirical experimentation and implementation standards yield experiences that stimulate both cognition and affect. Innovation guided by integrity and iterative refinement elucidates the underlying structure of algorithms. Ensuring broad accessibility to such experiences fosters curiosity and comprehension across heterogeneous audiences. We integrate artistic expertise, scientific research, and engineering precision to construct environments that illuminate the interplay between humans and technology.

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A **research & development** laboratory powering human-centric technology.

Established in February 2022, the lab designs and constructs site-specific interactive installations that integrate material fabrication processes with digital systems. Each project is developed as a functional environment that incorporates electronics, computation, and physical structures to enable social interaction, implement gamification, and support brand–audience engagement.

The work of Saphire Labs is informed by human-centred methodologies, empirical research, and technical standards of implementation. Innovation is approached as an iterative process that combines artistic inquiry, scientific analysis, and engineering practice. By aligning these domains, the laboratory develops installations that examine the relationship between human behaviour and technological systems in both public and commercial contexts.

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"A Nerd In Search of IKIGAI (A Reason for Being)"

New media artist, Technologist

STEVE ZAFEIRIOU

Steve Zafeiriou (b. 1998, Thessaloniki, GR) is a New Media Artist, Technologist, and Founder of Saphire Labs. His practice investigates how technology can influence, shape, and occasionally distort the ways individuals perceive the external world. By employing generative algorithms, electronic circuits, and interactive installations, he examines human behavior in relation to the illusory qualities of perceived reality, inviting observers to reconsider their assumptions and interpretations.

Short resume

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Selected Exhibitions

JUN 2025   Dark Tales x Steve Zafeiriou, Art – Literature – Philosophy, Alef Cilento Festival, Cardile, IT

JUN 2025   Dark Tales x Steve Zafeiriou, Non Fungible Conference, Lisbon, PT

APR 2025   The Return, MOMus Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki, GR

MAY 2025   MATAROA AWARDS 2025, Thessaloniki International Contemporary Fair, GR

SEP 2024   British Art Fair, Saatchi Gallery, London, UK

MAY 2024   MATAROA AWARDS 2024, Thessaloniki International Contemporary Fair, GR

SEP 2023   Culture Tech, Helexpo International Fair - MOMus Museum of Contemporary Art

APR 2023   Tension, MOMus Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki, GR

Performances

MAY 2025   Qualia – Audiovisual Contemporary Performance with NTH Dance Company (Chor.: Nadia Koutziampasi), National Theatre of Northern Greece

MAY 2025   Qualia – Audiovisual Contemporary Performance with NTH Dance Company (Chor.: Nadia Koutziampasi), Festival of Young Choreographers, National Theatre of Northern Greece

Awards

2025   Tezos Developer Award

2023   Art as Response to Mental Health Exhibition, Doncaster Art Fair, "People's Choice"

2014   26th EU Contest of Young Scientists, Greece's Selected Nominee

02

Belief engines.

Dynamic,
Generative,
Interactive

Physical distance is measured and translated into generative imagery, establishing a direct correspondence between spatial closeness and representational coherence. This mapping reflects contemporary philosophical and cognitive accounts in which belief functions as a stabilizing internal model, reinforced through sustained attention and weakened through detachment.

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Proximity, conviction, and the spatial architecture of belief.

Belief is often treated as a mental possession: Something an individual has, endorses, or declares.

In everyday language, belief appears as a statement; I believe that X is true, suggesting a discrete cognitive object that can be inspected, defended, or replaced.

Yet across philosophy, cognitive science, and social theory, belief **has increasingly been understood not as a static content but as a dynamic orientation toward the world**, shaping perception, attention, identity, and action prior to conscious deliberation.

Belief Engines is an interactive sculpture that renders this orientation spatial, embodied, and measurable.

Using a timeof flight sensor and generative imagery, the work translates the viewer's physical proximity into a visual modulation of a floating human figure. As the viewer approaches the sculpture, the image gains coherence and clarity; as they withdraw, it fragments into abstraction. The system rewards closeness. Distance withholds definition.

Rather than asking viewers to articulate what they believe, the work asks a more fundamental question:

How close are you to your beliefs?

In doing so, Belief Engines reframes belief as a relational phenomenon; one that strengthens through proximity, attention, and sustained engagement, and weakens through detachment and distance.

Belief beyond proposition: Philosophical foundations.

Cognitive science: Belief as internal model.

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In analytic philosophy, belief has traditionally been defined as a propositional attitude:

A mental state in which a subject stands in relation to a proposition, as in "S believes that P" (Schwitzgebel, 2006).

This framework distinguishes belief from knowledge, doubt, and disbelief, and has been central to debates in epistemology and philosophy of mind. Yet even within this tradition, philosophers have emphasized that **belief does not require continuous conscious endorsement**; many beliefs are dispositional, revealed through patterns of action rather than explicit avowal.

Phenomenological traditions push this insight further.

For thinkers such as Merleau-Ponty, belief is not primarily a judgment but a pre-reflective trust in the world's intelligibility; a background

orientation that allows perception and action to unfold at all (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

From this perspective, belief is less like a sentence in the head and more like a posture: a way of being situated in relation to the environment.

Belief Engines aligns with this phenomenological view. The work does not solicit verbal beliefs or propositional claims.

Instead, it stages belief as a bodily stance enacted through movement in space.

To approach the sculpture is to take up a position of alignment; to remain distant is to suspend or weaken that alignment. Belief appears here not as a mental declaration but as an embodied orientation.

Contemporary cognitive science reinforces this relational understanding.

In predictive processing and active inference frameworks, beliefs are modeled as probabilistic internal representations that the brain uses to predict sensory input and guide action (Albarracín et al., 2022).

Rather than passively recording the world, the brain actively generates expectations about hidden causes and updates them in response to error.

In this view, belief is inseparable from perception and action. **What we believe determines what we expect to see, which cues we sample, and how surprising the world is allowed to be.**

Beliefs thus function as energy saving devices, reducing cognitive load by stabilizing interpretation at the cost of flexibility (Albarracín et al., 2022).

Crucially, belief is graded rather than binary.

Confidence increases or decreases depending on reinforcement, coherence with other beliefs, and identity relevance. Belief Engines translates this graded structure into spatial form. Physical distance becomes an analog for epistemic confidence:

Closeness corresponds to reinforcement and coherence, while distance corresponds to uncertainty and fragmentation.

Proximity, distance, and epistemic commitment.

Distance has long served as a metaphor for knowledge and belief.

To be "close to the truth", to "grasp" an idea, or to "step back" from an assumption are all spatial metaphors that encode epistemic relations. Belief Engines literalizes these metaphors.

The sculpture's core interaction, mapping distance to representational clarity, models belief as something that consolidates through approach.

This reflects empirical findings in psychology: beliefs, particularly those linked to identity, strengthen through repeated exposure, emotional investment, and social reinforcement, while detachment and lack of engagement tend to weaken conviction (Albarracín et al., 2022).

Importantly, the work does not portray belief as something that becomes truer through closeness, but something that becomes stronger.

This distinction is critical.

The sculpture makes no epistemic guarantee; instead, it reveals a structural fact about belief systems: they intensify with proximity, regardless of their truth value.

Identity, the body, and the floating figure.

At the center of the generative imagery is a suspended human figure, never fully grounded, never fully dissolved.

This figure functions as a diagram of identity under belief.

Psychological and social research has shown that socalled "core beliefs" are tightly coupled to self-concept and group identity; altering them can threaten one's sense of coherence and belonging (Rigoli, 2022).

The floating body visualizes this conditional stability.

Identity appears here not as a fixed essence but as a provisional configuration; one that gains coherence through sustained proximity to certain narratives, values, and assumptions. As the viewer approaches, the figure stabilizes; as they withdraw, it fragments.

Identity, like belief, is shown to be relational and contingent, maintained through ongoing engagement rather than "once and for all" commitment.

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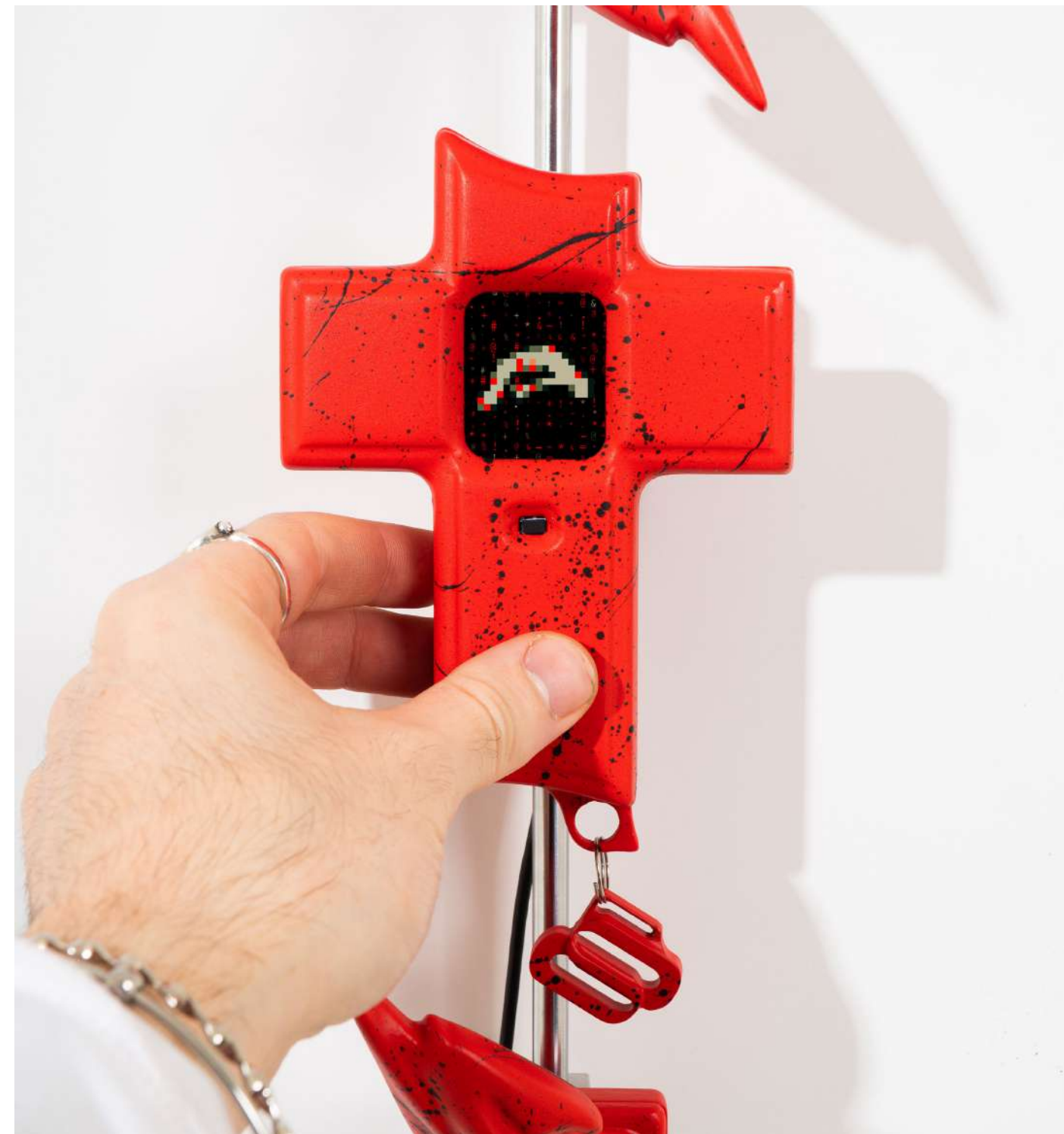
Social and collective dimensions of belief.

013

Belief is never purely individual.

Computational and social-psychological models describe belief systems as networks, shaped by both internal coherence and social conformity (Rodriguez et al., 2016).

Individuals tend to adopt beliefs **that fit with their existing worldview** while also aligning with those held by groups they depend on for belonging, status, or survival.
Although Belief Engines operates at the scale of a single viewer, it gestures toward these collective dynamics.

Installed in a shared space, the work allows viewers to observe one another's patterns of approach and withdrawal, turning belief into a visible social performance.

The sculpture thus functions as a microcosm of belief ecology: zones of intensity emerge where attention clusters, while peripheral areas remain vague and unstable.

# Attention architecture and technological mediation.

Steve's broader practice has examined how attention is architected by technological systems; interfaces, platforms, and **environments that subtly shape what we notice and how we interpret it.**

Belief can be understood as attention extended over time: what we repeatedly attend to becomes familiar, meaningful, and eventually true-seeming.

Digital media systems already exploit this dynamic.

Recommendation algorithms **amplify beliefs** by rewarding engagement, reinforcing narratives through repetition rather than argument. Belief Engines exposes this mechanism by stripping it down to a single variable: distance.

The work offers a rare transparency, allowing viewers to feel how clarity is not given but earned through proximity.

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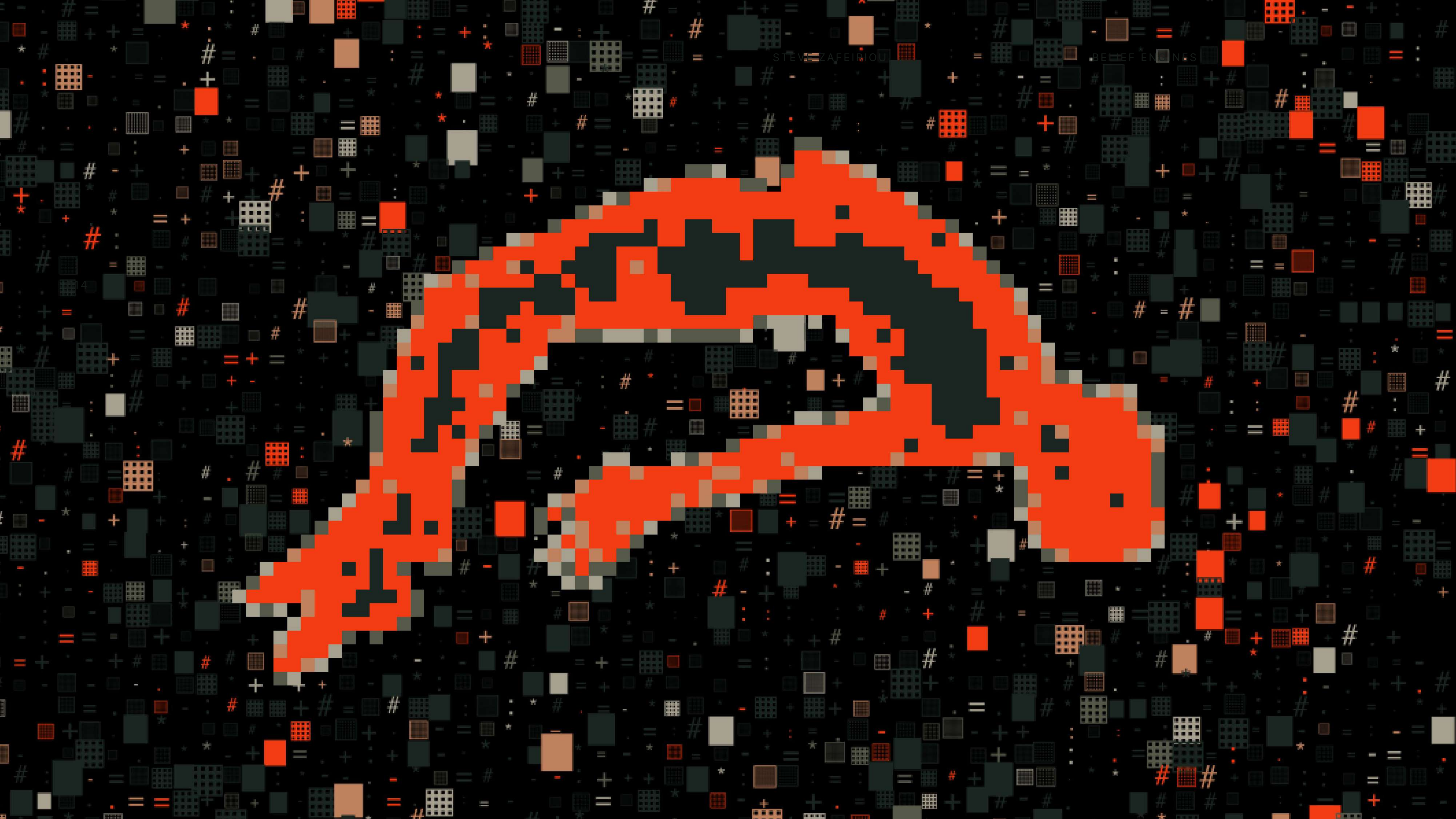
Materiality and organic form.

The sculpture's organic, 3D printed PLA form contrasts with the computational logic it houses.

PLA, a biodegradable bioplastic, evokes growth, fragility, and impermanence.

This material choice reinforces the conceptual claim that belief systems, while often experienced as solid and timeless, are historically contingent and structurally vulnerable.

Belief is not monument; it is metabolism.

Perception, self-measurement, and reflexive uncertainty.

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At the level of immediate phenomenology, Belief Engines stages a loop of self-measurement.

The viewer is aware that the system is measuring them; **calculating how far they are from the sensor**, and simultaneously becomes aware of their own micro decisions:

What happens if I stay just outside the "reward zone"? How does the image judge my distance?

Rather than simply persuading or nudging, the work exposes how small, continuous adjustments, one step forward, one step back, change what the world offers in return.

Belief is presented as neither purely subjective ("my private convictions") nor purely objective ("the facts out there") but as something that emerges in the relation between an embodied observer and a responsive environment.

In a media landscape increasingly shaped by recommendation engines and personalized feeds, this insight is urgent.

Digital systems already modulate what we see based on our past "proximity" to content; our clicks, dwell times, interaction histories.

Belief Engines brings that logic into a transparent, single-channel form:

Your closeness is the only signal; your transformed view of the body is the only output. What is usually an opaque data pipeline becomes an aesthetic experience.
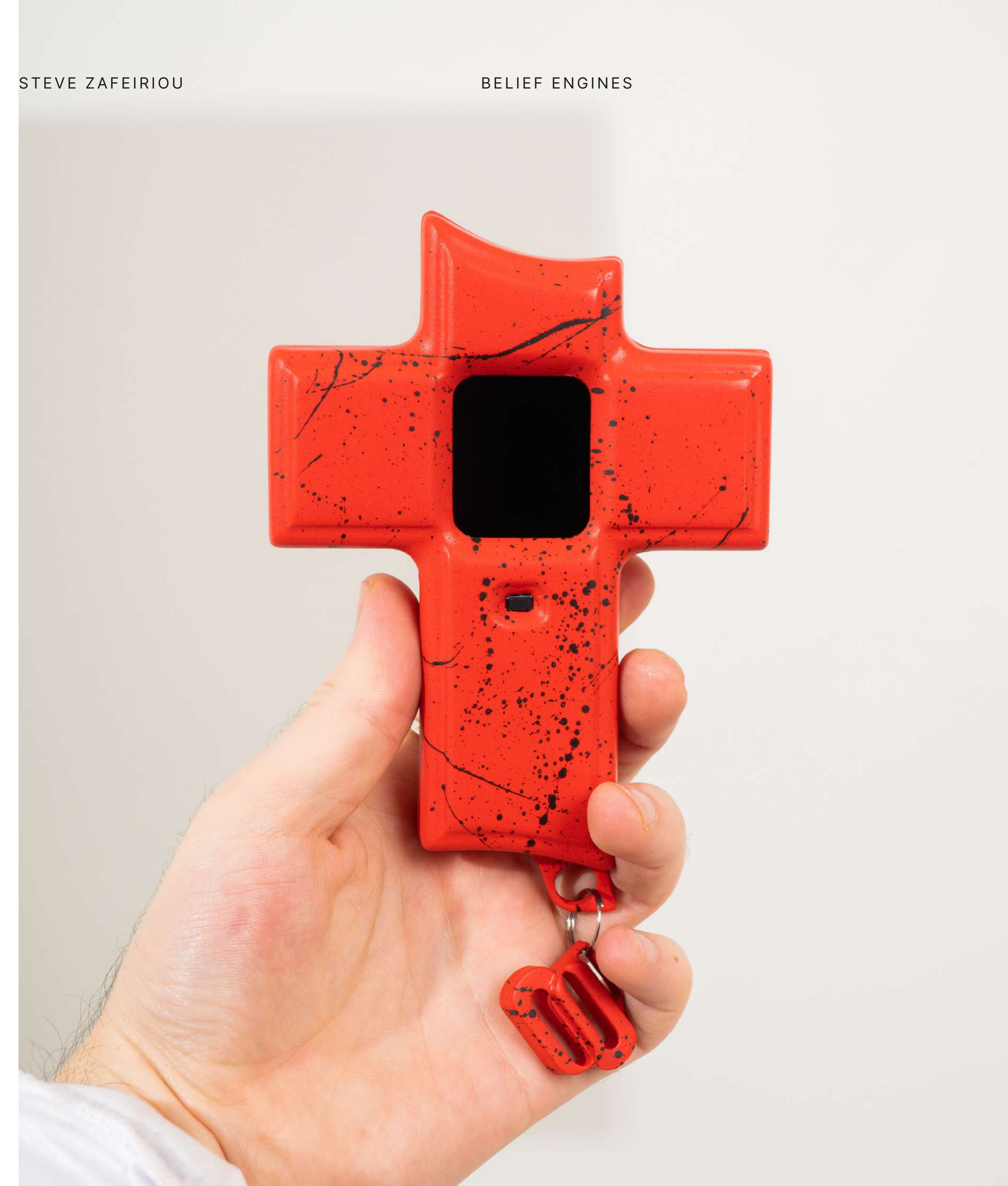
A machine for feeling the gap.

Belief Engines is not a didactic illustration of belief theory; it is a machine for feeling the gap between self and conviction.

Through a modest set of components, bio-plastic shells, a microcomputer, a time of flight sensor, and a repertoire of generative images, **the work transforms distance into a philosophical instrument.**

By rewarding physical approach with visual coherence, **the sculpture stages belief as something that consolidates under attention yet remains fundamentally dynamic and revisable.**

It resonates with contemporary accounts of belief as probabilistic internal models, stabilized by identity and social feedback, and with your ongoing exploration of how technological systems structure attention, choice, and value (Granados Samayoa JA et al., 2025).

In a time when **digital architectures quietly shape what millions of people come to regard as true**, Belief Engines offers a rare counter move:

An interface that reveals, rather than conceals, the mechanics by which proximity becomes conviction.

The question it leaves with the viewer is deliberately uncomfortable:

If you had to walk toward your beliefs for them to become clear, how close would you dare to stand?

017

References

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03

Collector notes.

Generative Art for Unique Spaces

Belief Engines is a self-contained interactive sculpture that explores belief as a dynamic relationship between attention, identity, and environment. The work employs a time of flight laser distance sensor to measure the viewer's proximity and translate it into generative visual states. This interaction produces a direct feedback loop: engagement strengthens representation; withdrawal weakens it.

Belief engines

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Belief is rarely encountered as a statement.

More often, it functions as an orientation; an underlying structure that shapes perception, attention, and identity before it is consciously articulated.

Belief Engines renders this orientation spatial and visible.

The sculpture measures physical proximity and translates distance into generative imagery of a suspended human figure. As proximity increases, the figure becomes more coherent; as distance grows, it dissolves into abstraction. Closeness is rewarded with clarity. Withdrawal produces ambiguity.

The work proposes belief as a relational process rather than a fixed conviction.

Beliefs strengthen through sustained proximity; through attention, repetition, and embodied engagement, and weaken through detachment.

Identity, in turn, appears not as a stable essence but as a contingent formation held together by the beliefs one remains close to.
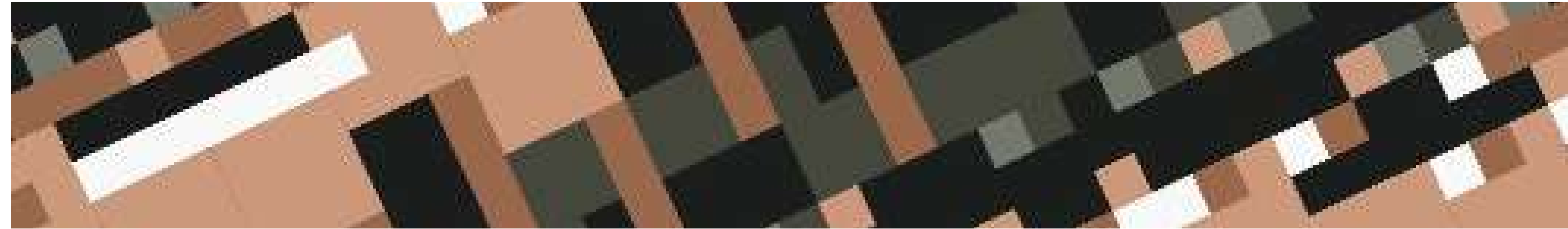
By making belief measurable in space, Belief Engines exposes the often invisible architectures through which conviction forms. It offers belief not as something one possesses, but as something continually enacted through orientation, distance, and attention.

Contacts.

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