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Gallery hours:
Tuesday-Friday 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.
Saturday 12:00-5:00 p.m.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Imagination Doctors

January 16–March 21, 2026

Curated by Denny Mwaura and Lorelei Stewart

Opening Reception: Friday, January 16, 6–8 p.m.



Pros Arts Payasos/Clown Ensemble. Top to bottom: Jean Parisi, Frank Melcori, Susana Aguilar, and Lionel Bottari. 1992-3. Photo by Diana Solis.

Artists: Alberto Aguilar, Sophia Karina English, William Estrada, Maria Gaspar, Mauricio López F., Victoria Martinez, Alan Medina, Leticia Pardo, Diana Solis, Pros Arts Studio, Jiashun Zhou.

Gallery 400 at the University of Illinois is pleased to announce *Imagination Doctors*, the first presentation on the long arc of the Pros Arts Studio ensemble and its influential legacy on Chicago's art and education scene. Established in 1978, the Pilsen-based collective offered free, diverse artistic workshops and performances for Chicago's communities across various locations, including streets, parks, community centers, and local K-12 schools. Over its four decades, the organization assembled over 150 creative members, ranging from puppeteers and clowns to visual and performing artists, who were committed to highlighting the role artists play in enriching the lives of the communities in which they live. Pros Arts Studio integrated lively arts programming into the curricula of public schools, initiated the first Día de Los Muertos Parade in Pilsen, and hosted a *Hotline 21* show, a Chicago Access Network Television call-in show that enhanced young students' literacy and social skills while also amplifying their voices on social issues.

Growing out of a multi-year relationship that resulted in an installation for UIC Gallery 400's exhibition [*Learning Together: Art Education and Community*](#) (2024-25), *Imagination Doctors* features materials from Pros Arts' archives—print ephemera, photographs, videos, handmade performance sets—alongside newly commissioned works by eleven contemporary artists, including former Pros Arts collaborators and students. Chosen by curators Denny Mwaura and Lorelei Stewart, these artists are developing new artworks that respond to the ensemble's archive and/or invokes aspects of the ethos that has powered their multifaceted work for decades. Pros Arts' work was characterized by improvisation, ephemerality, embeddedness, community, longevity, memory, cultural specificity, joy, silliness, imagination, self-determination, challenging institutional models, and collaboration.

Maria Gaspar, a former collaborating teacher of Pros Arts, presents a work that reflects on her mother's participation in the collective as a clown and the collective's influence within her teaching and artistic practice. She says, "One of the most memorable experiences was learning how Pros Arts engaged with clowning. It revived an interest in clowning for me because I recalled that Pros Arts and my mom used clowning similarly—as a social practice." A student of Pros Arts when in elementary school, filmmaker Alan Medina is making an experimental short film, *One Grand Spot* (working title), that documents the memories and materials housed in the 100-year-old Pilsen building that holds Pros Arts' archive. Jiashun Zhou's large-scale tapestry offers a virtual view of one of the building's entrances. Alberto Aguilar partners with three of his students to create a short film that utilizes props and costumes from the archive. Victoria Martinez's painting references backdrops created by students of Galileo Scholastic Academy during drama workshops conducted by Pros Arts in 1997. Mauricio López F. reveres the unrestrained creativity and imagination fostered during childhood by creating a drawing instrument that enables visitors to draw expressively, as a child would, on the gallery's walls.

Anchoring these new works are a large-scale painted sculpture/performance set of a lavandería (laundromat) from the Pros Arts archive; an ofrenda (offering or altar) honoring Pros Arts artists and collaborators who have died; an installation marking the hundreds of collaborators across Pros Arts' history; and a collection of posters, cards, photographs, and more from the Pros Arts archive. By combining archival materials and newly commissioned artworks, *Imagination Doctors* inventively evokes the broad reach and lasting impact of Pros Arts Studio's work in art, education, and community building.

Related Programs:

To be announced mid-December 2025.

Tours:

Gallery staff regularly offer exhibition tours. Schedule a tour that meets your group's specific interests via our [website](#), 312-996-6114, or gallery400@uic.edu.

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Founded in 1983, UIC Gallery 400 is one of the nation's most vibrant university galleries, showcasing work at the leading edge of contemporary art, architecture, and design. The Gallery's program of exhibitions, lectures, film and video screenings, and performances features interdisciplinary and experimental practices. Operating within the School of Art and Art History in the College of Architecture, Design, and the Arts at the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC), Gallery 400 endeavors to make the arts and its practitioners accessible to a broad spectrum of the public and to cultivate a variety of cultural and intellectual perspectives. UIC Gallery 400 is recognized for its support of the creation of new work, the diversity of its programs and participants, and the development of experimental models for multidisciplinary exhibitions.

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