The art collection of Heather and Tony Podesta is internationally regarded for its audacity and ambitious scope. Called "power collectors" by The Washington Post, their zeal for collecting contemporary photography and video is unrivaled in the American mid-Atlantic area. A visit to their home reveals an intense collecting preoccupation with the theme of how artists use self-image in their work. This curatorial concentration may be rooted in social aspects because the Podestas also develop friendships with many of the artists they collect and tend to collect them in depth. "With self-portraits, it can be hard to separate the work from the artist, especially if you know the artist," comments Heather Podesta. Tony Podesta, however, is careful to note that it is the artwork that catches their eyes first. "Almost in every case, we bought first and met second."

A dominant trend in contemporary art is the artist's use of the self as an object onto which viewers can project multiple narratives, agendas and meanings. Video, video stills and photography are frequently the preferred media in this enterprise because they carry a readily-accessible history of film, photojournalism, performance documentation and family snapshots to a broad audience.

Following the seminal work of such artists as Cindy Sherman and collaborative team Gilbert and George in the 1970s, artists have increasingly adopted a performative role within their photographic works. Frequently referred to as photo-based work, this area of contemporary practice has been investigated by a growing number of artists including a new generation that emerged in the 90s. Artists such as Marina Abramovic, Ann Hamilton, Sam Taylor-Wood and Gillian Wearing deploy a variety of theatrical strategies, many of which are influenced by post-structuralist issues of identity, social roles, political re-contextualization and metaphoric transformation.

Organized by Curator's Office in Washington, DC, this traveling exhibition is curated by Heather and Tony Podesta with assistance from Curator's Office director, Andrea Pollan, and Podesta collections manager, Gabriela Mizes. Curator's Office would like to thank the following graduate students from the George Washington University Departments of Art and Art History who assisted in the research and writing about each artist: Mandy Burrow, Larissa Raddell, Cicie Sattarnilasskorn, Amanda Shoemaker, Jennifer Tafe, and Brian Twilley.

Curated by Brenda LaBier