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Progressive's Annual Report Bares All

PDNewswire by Jay DeFoore

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CLEVELAND – Though most photographers would agree that the annual report market has taken a huge hit, a few brave corporations still see the value of photography. Case in point: Cleveland design firm Nesnadny + Schwartz used photographs by John Coplans to illustrate the Progressive Corporation's 2002 annual report.



Nesnadny + Schwartz president, Mark Schwartz, says Coplans' black and white nude self-portraits were the perfect illustration of the insurance company's "transparency" theme, which was meant to distance Progressive from the corporate scandals that plagued companies like Enron and WorldCom last year.

"The idea of being open, transparent and self-examining in their business is something [the Progressive Corporation] takes seriously," Schwartz says. "John's work has been about self-examination in a brutally honest way."

When it comes to art, the Progressive Corporation is exactly that, progressive. The company has a large contemporary art collection, and new pieces are added continually. Still, not everyone was sold on the idea of seeing a naked man alongside consolidated statements of income and shareholder equity. One incredulous person asked Schwartz why they couldn't use nude portraits of model Christi Turlington instead. But jokes aside, Schwartz says Coplans' photographs are compelling and relevant without looking like the "typical corporate BS."

"These are honest pictures of an 82-year-old man with no clothes on," Schwartz says. "But at the same time, many are quite beautiful."

Nesnadny + Schwartz has been designing the Progressive Corporation's annual reports for the past 20 years. Previous reports have used photography from Gregory Crewdson, Stephen Frailey, Rimma Gerloving and Valeriy Gerlovin and Robert ParkeHarrison. Schwartz says he uses photography more than illustration because of its implied honesty and human connection.

"Photographs bring something nothing else can, a sense of immediacy and a connection with a human being," he says.

For those corporate photographers lamenting the days when annual report work was steady, Schwartz says hang in there.

"Learn to do more with less and work a little leaner," Schwartz advises. "Nothing will ever replace photography."

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