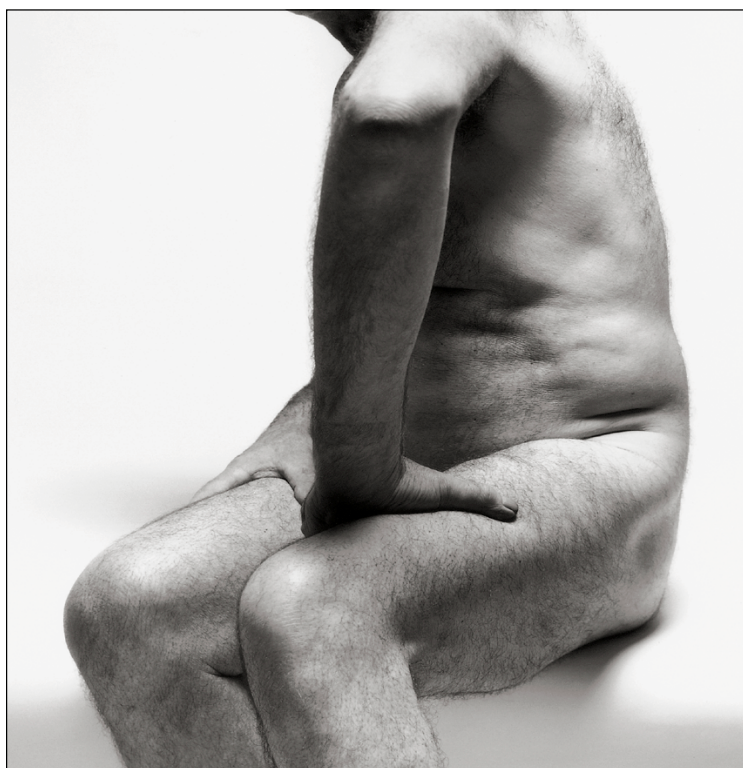


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A New Kind of Transparency

By Tim Nudd



NAKED TRUTH: A Coplans self-portrait

Now that transparency has become the buzzword of post-Enron corporate America, Ohio-based insurance company The Progressive Corporation decided it should be the theme of its 2002 annual report. Offering its own take on open books, Cleveland design firm Nesnadny + Schwartz employed the photography of New York artist John Coplans for the report, to make the point that here is a company that really has nothing to hide. Coplans takes photos of himself. Nude. He's 82.

"Time Magazine asked, 'Why not Christy Turlington?'" says creative director Mark Schwartz. "No. 1, we couldn't afford her. No. 2, John Coplans has a better ass."

That may be in the eye of the beholder. The cover of the report is dotted with 15 holes that hint at a mysterious landscape of flesh and wrinkles beneath. Inside, the photographs offer intensely detailed images of an old man's hirsute, sometimes bumpy topography, filled with angles and shadows, nooks, crannies and hair.

"The [company's] initial reaction was, 'These are a little grisly,'" Schwartz admits. "The truth is not always pretty. If you start to sugarcoat this theme, that's what Enron was doing."

Nesnadny + Schwartz works with Progressive's art curator, Toby Lewis, in getting images for the book. Coplans' self-portraits were chosen in part to attract attention—Schwartz acknowledges they have a bit of shock value—and in part because they say "transparency" in the most realistic way, Schwartz says.

"It's about risk—so is insurance. It works in many ways," he says.