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Puzzle

IT'S BEEN A WHILE, but do you remember how resourceful I tried to be as a broke teenager? You remember how I wanted to paint like Bob Ross, but didn't have any money for supplies? How I could only afford two colors, so I chose black and white? I did a lot of those paintings. Black, white and shades of grey.

In fact, your sister has one. It's of me in shorts and a tank top with one large, door-knocker earring in my left ear. My hair is braided into a ponytail and I'm sitting on the steps of our porch at our house on Almond Drive. I'm smiling with bare feet. The painting used to hang on a wall when she had her house. I don't remember seeing it in her apartment. I'm assuming it's still there.

One of those black and white paintings, the one titled, "Puzzle," isn't on canvas though. It looks like it's on butcher paper, but I'm pretty sure I remember painting it on a piece of paper bag. I wouldn't have had money for butcher paper. I remember trimming the edges so that no one could tell it was a grocery bag. I was proud darn proud of myself then.

One never can predict the mind of a teenager. One minute they're thinking of school and candy, the next minute they're thinking about homelessness and the state of the planet. I can't remember now, what train of thought led me to examining puzzle pieces as an artistic challenge, but obviously, some moving unseen moving spark got me there. When I was done, I wasn't so excited about the results. It took years for me to appreciate what I had done. I had to "find" it several times through the years. I stared at it, softening my critical eye, like I do in meditation. Then, I put it away again.

It's dated 1989, but you can clearly see that the year was not written at the same time as the title of the piece. I don't remember exactly, but I suspect I dated it years after I completed it. The title looks as though it was written with a colored marker running out of ink. The year, "1989" is written in a smaller hand with what looks like a rollerball ink pen. When I analyze the subject and the execution of "Puzzle," I suspect it was created later. I'm thinking it was probably done shortly after I created, "Pyramid."

"Pyramid," was a challenge of a statement made by my summer school geometry teacher, that we needed only four colors for any configuration of shapes not to touch its same color. This was the beginning of my practice of geometrically contained, multicolor abstraction. "Puzzle," looks like I was on that same kick.

You probably didn't pay attention to my work then. I don't think anyone did, except me. Still, it's pretty weird that work I tossed around as a child is kind of part of this road map to my current body of work. I wish I paid more attention to what I was doing. Or not.

"Puzzle" – acrylic on paper bag c. 1989