Loon Switchplate
By Sheryl Thompson

Delta Ceramcoat Acrylic Colors-

Black	Drizzle Grey
Black Green	Hippo Grey
Blue Heaven	Tomato Spice
Burnt Umber	Wedgwood Green
Dark Victorian Teal	White

BRUSHES -
Round Brushes #5
Liner Brushes #1
Flat Brushes #12, #8

Other Materials-
Ruler, pencil, tracing paper, transfer paper (white & grey), masking tape, brown paper bag
Matte Varnish, All Purpose Sealer

The beauty of this pattern is that it works up quick. For that reason it was a great seller for me when I wholesaled my painted work to gift shops and traveled on the craft show circuit. I could paint 20 of these in a day in a production line manner and they sold like hotcakes for the storeowners.
The first step is to sand the switchplate. Pay particular attention to the routed sides, as they can be a little rough. Then thoroughly wipe down with a soft cloth or tack rag to remove the sawdust /sanding residue.
Then I mix some All Purpose Sealer with the Blue Heaven paint (1:2 ratio). This saves time and accomplishes the sealing and base painting processes in one step. Let this dry thoroughly and rub the
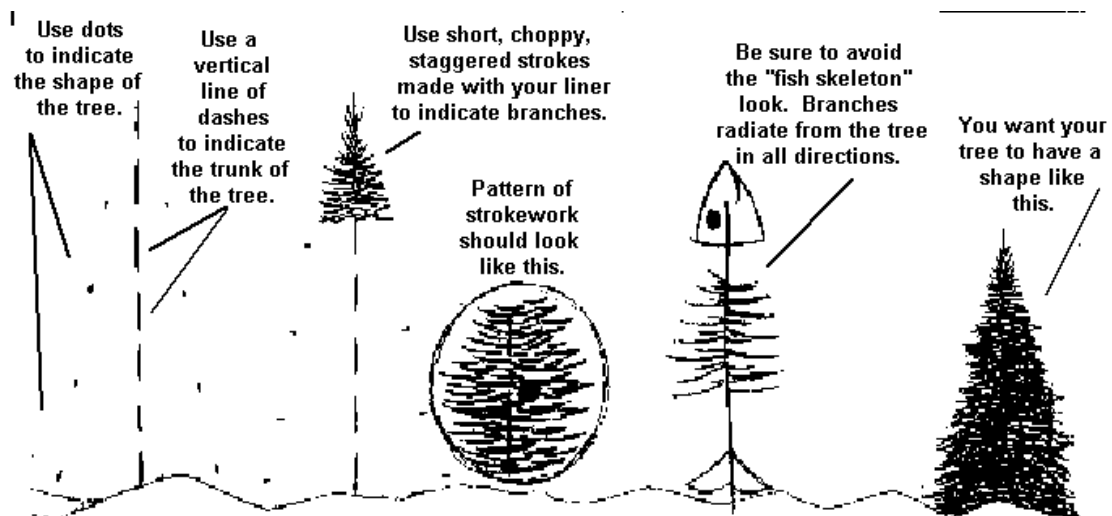
surface with a brown paper bag. Line the traced pattern up with the switchplate and transfer the shoreline and make just a few dots to indicate where the tops of the trees in the background forest will fall.

Next are the clouds. Clouds are not difficult to freehand so don't put any marks on the sky. I sideload my #12 Flat brush with White and with the painted edge up I start at the highest point of the cloud and lightly push the brush towards the outer edge of the cloud in one direction and taper off. Then I go back to the highest point again and go in the other direction gradually tapering the ends. After the first cloud is painted just drop down and repeat. Continue to drop down and overlap them. Have a light touch so that some of the blue from the sky shows through providing shading. You can go back after they are dry and just highlight the top edge of the cloud with a little more white. That completes the sky…let this dry.

Next we will paint the background filler trees. Take your #12 flat and load it with Dark Victorian Teal. The background forest is painted by riding on the chisel edge of the brush, placed at a 90 degree angle to the shore, and moving the brush up and down to get the jagged appearance of spruce tree tops. Fill in the base near the shoreline so that it is solid and opaque. If the forest top is a little mottled in appearance, that is fine as it gives the forest depth. Side load your #12 flat with Black Green, place the paint edge of the brush against the shore and float shading across the base of the forest. Make this a wide float walking the shading up the forest 1/3 of the way up the trees.

Base the shoreline in Drizzle Grey. When this is dry indicate rocks by sideloading your #8 flat with Hippo Grey and floating the tops of the rocks in a random pattern.

Side load your #12 Flat with Wedgwood Green and with the paint edge up toward the top of the switchplate and referring to the photo, indicate the tops of the bushes that are along the shore. These are done in the same way the clouds were painted, letting the background green show through.

Let the bushes dry thoroughly and then we start the dark spruce trees in the foreground. The individual foreground spruce trees are painted in Black Green with a #1 liner brush. I like to freehand these as they go very quickly once you get the hang of it. I start to paint a spruce tree by making a series of dashes vertically that would be the trunk of a tree and a series of dots at the outer edge of the tree to help keep the shape. I use these marks for a guide so that I keep the tree straight and somewhat symmetrical.   I do not use a solid line….it is easier to hide the trunk with the technique that I use if you use dashes. You do not want the trunk to be obvious and at all costs be sure to avoid the "fish skeleton" look. I start at the top and with my #1 Liner loaded with an inky like consistency of Black Green I draw in the top most branches with my brush. These branches tilt upward at about a 45-degree angle…that natural plant tendency to reach for the light source. These strokes are done in short strokes in a choppy staggered pattern all the way down the tree. The Dark Victorian Teal will show through and give the tree dimension. As you make the longer branches as you travel down the trunk notice that as they get a little longer the are pulled to a more horizontal angle because of gravity. The really long branches toward the base of the tree actually slant downward because they are larger and the pull of gravity is even greater.

Use dots to indicate the shape of the tree.

Use a vertical line of dashes to indicate the trunk of the tree.

Use short, choppy, staggered strokes made with your liner to indicate branches.

Pattern of strokework should look like this.

Be sure to avoid the "fish skeleton" look. Branches radiate from the tree in all directions.

You want your tree to have a shape like this.

To paint the reflection in the water, make an inky consistency of Dark Victorian Teal and use the same brush technique as I did to do the background trees only I am looking for a more transparent and lighter tone here. Also the reflection is only about one half the size of the background trees. Let this thoroughly dry. Next create the reflections of the Black Green Trees with your #8 Flat brush. Use a slightly watered down Black Green so that the reflection will be a more transparent image of the tree on the shore. Ride on the chisel

edge of your brush and zigzag back and forth horizontally, taking care to try to keep the lines somewhat parallel to the shoreline. Finally sideload the #12 flat with Dark Victorian Teal and with the brush on the lake and the paint edge of the brush against the shoreline, float all the way along under the shore. Remember you want your reflection to be a mirror image of the lake shoreline.

To create a ripple effect on the water, load the #8 Flat with 1:1 Blue Heaven/Dark Victorian Teal mix and riding on the chisel edge, create the ripples all through the water. Take your # 8 Flat and do the same thing sparingly with some white. It is important to remember the level principle of water, and make sure that these ripple lines do not go down hill in one direction or the other. But stay parallel to the shoreline.
Next we paint the loon. Transfer the shape of the loon onto the switchplate. I use my #1 liner to base the loon in. Base the breast area in white and the rest of the body including the head in black. Take your 10/0 liner and draw the two little crescent lines that you see on the neck with White. Then you make very fine vertical black lines up and down through the white crescents.   The pattern on the back of the loon is referred to as their "checkerboard". Note that the checkerboard pattern covers about 3/4 of the body but at the bottom near the water line on the bird and at the back by the tail feathers it changes to very fine white dots. I use my 10/0 liner for the checkerboard and the dots. Note on the breast of the bird there are some fine black lines that come out of the black body area and travel across the breast to the base of the neck. Some of these lines connect the two areas of the body and some only go half way across the breast. Use your 10/0 liner and an inky consistency of black paint to make these. The final touch is a dot of Tomato Spice for the loon's red eye. Then take your #8 flat and create a reflection for the loon with 1:1 Blue Heaven/Dark Victorian Teal mix. The outside routed edge of the switchplate is painted with Burnt Umber (also looks nice painted with Dark Forest Green. After the switchplate is dry, apply two coats of Matte Varnish. Switchplates need at lest two coats and maybe even a 3rd as they need to be frequently wiped down as they see a lot of oil from hands.