In discussing the format of a painting you should consider size, scale, painting material. For the most part, we have employed the very old tradition of canvas stretched over a wooden frame and oil paint (it tends to be a convenient and durable format). What if you change this format?

Canvas is a relatively neutral ground -- what happens if you paint on wood, cardboard, or over newspaper ads etc.? What is the relationship of images to the ground you paint on? How much should images dominate ground or ground dominate images? Should they inform each other (for example, wood grain used to create water, advertising imagery melded with painted imagery?)

Different paint materials read differently---airbrush, sign enamel are very industrial; acrylic and modeling pastes are plastic, modern. What happens if you combine different painting materials? Look at the work of Anselm Kiefer, for example, worked on huge scale, over 10 ft. in each direction and combined oil paint, tar, lead, straw etc.

Consider using found materials in your work. If you add an object to your painting, don’t think of it merely in terms of its original context (actual playing card used in picture of a card game). Instead, how can you transform it? Consider using an object in terms of its formal qualities (shape, texture etc.) and/or for its metaphorical implications. Vernon Fisher used the metaphorical and formal qualities of a wooden column and painted a scene of the ocean on it. If you paint on an object, does it become sculpture or painting (look at Willie Birch)? In other words, form and content must be considered.

Do a painting which alters the format you generally use. Experiment -- consider scale, shape and size of canvas, type of ground (canvas or...?), mixed media, alternate media. Examine form in relation to content (you decide what you want to paint about). Think about the role of the painting to the viewer and the role of the painting to the subject matter.

EXAMPLES:
Sara Kuseske, for example, used pieces of stripped down corrugated cardboard on which she painted images of sheep as a metaphorical and personal expression of her religious beliefs. These were atmospheric paintings where the corrugations blurred the images in a beautiful way. The paintings spoke of the transformation from mundane to divine, from refuse material to precious art object.

Molly Hughes combined appropriated images and alternative format. She created a large black and white, mixed media piece that combined a top layer of B&W transparencies of nude female images from art history superimposed over a B&W painted self-portrait. The transparencies both revealed and distorted the painting underneath, an interesting comment on the image of women.