*« We organize ourselves collectively and we are all women. »*

— FORMAT [[1]](#footnote-2)

Established in 1983, and closed down in 2002, *Format* was the first independent all-women photography agency. It was founded by Maggie Murray, Sheila Gray, Pam Isherwood, Anita Corbin, Jenny Matthews, Joanne O'Brien, Raissa Page and Val Wilmer. During its twenty-years history, the agency represented twenty leading women photographers. Inspired by the Women’s Liberation Movement, Format was born out of a feminist framework and overlapped with other image-creation endeavors such as the mix-media collective *The Hackney Flashers*.

As Val Wilmer explained, at the very beginning the agency founding members thought that they « should be like Magnum. »[[2]](#footnote-3) But *Format* was really created out of necessity: to create a context conducive to a professional photographic activity and also support women just starting to work as professional photographers. Thus, *Format* supported women's careers in the profession and disseminated alternative and critical images in the face of stereotypes and dominant representations. Their photographs captured a range of important political events and momentous social movements, including the women’s peace camp at Greenham Common, Reclaim the Night, LGBTQ+ marches and demonstrations, the Disability rights movement, soup kitchens during the Miners’ Strike, and various women’s rights movements and demonstrations. *Format* photographers also covered issues in more depth thanks to their lengthy documentary approach which then circulated via books such as *Our Own Freedom* by Maggie Murray (1981) ; *Striking Women. Communities and Coal* with contributions by Brenda Prince and Raissa Page (1986) ; *No Place Like Home. Echoes from Kosovo* by Melanie Friend (2001) and *A Matter of Minutes: The Enduring Legacy of Bloody Sunday* by Joanne O’Brien (2002).

Text by Maggie Murray & Taous Dahmani

1. « Format Photographers », *Feminist Review* , Winter, 1984, No. 18, Cultural Politics (Winter, 1984), p. 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Val Wilmer talking to Carla Mitchell, 4th June 2018. <https://vimeo.com/332259872> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)