

blind

News - July 15, 2025

by Guénola Pellen



If you happened to be driving along Route 1 in the eastern United States in the summer of 1954, you might have encountered a peculiar crew in or near a car. A petite, brown-haired woman, scanning the landscape with her portable darkroom. Beside her, her dog, a giant schnauzer, and a newlywed couple, Damon behind the wheel and Sara, who played assistant.

You may have recognized Berenice Abbott, an icon of American photography, as she embarked on a 4,000-mile journey along America's oldest road, Route 1. From cool Maine to the sunny Florida Keys, she crossed Georgia, Virginia, and Connecticut, connecting the original thirteen colonies. "For this reason [...], U.S. 1 makes a great appeal to the imagination," Abbott said.

The photographer, famous for her portraits and documentary images that showcase urban life and the transformation of cities during the 1930s, set out to capture it "before bulldozers and derricks moved in." Before Interstate 95 transformed this rapidly changing America, torn between the cultural revolution – the invention of the contraceptive pill, the birth of rock, the rise of supermarkets and fast food – and an ambient hyper-conservatism, against a backdrop of witch hunts and struggles for civil rights.



Post Office, East Machias, Maine, 1954. © Berenice Abbott, Berenice Abbott Archive, The Image Centre © Estate of Ronald Kurtz / Getty Images.



Roadside Diner, New Jersey, 1954. © Berenice Abbott, Berenice Abbott Archive, The Image Centre © Estate of Ronald Kurtz / Getty Images.



Country Inn on the Mall, Bangor 2024 © Anna Fox and Karen Knorr



Summer Fair, Doc Myers Park Hobe Sound 2024 © Anna Fox and Karen Knorr

Sixty years later, between 2016 and 2019, two photographers and friends, British photographer Anna Fox and American photographer Karen Knorr, decided to follow in Abbott's footsteps. Their series, "U.S. Route 1," led them to explore her journey during the Trump era. Armed with a range of cameras, from iPhones to DSLRs, they co-authored a body of 150 color images: portraits of locals, landscapes, scenes of parking lots, pharmacies, cafes, and motel managers.

"U.S. Route 1" is a storytelling project about contemporary North America," they explain. A living tribute to Berenice Abbott, whose unfinished and still little-known work is being revealed on this occasion in Arles. "We chose this project to re-call the significance of the work of Abbott, as too many histories of women photographers are neglected." The artists, who in 2016 dedicated a research project to women photographers, *Fast Forward: Women in Photography*, challenged "the male dominated mythology of the road and road tripping" by bringing new voices. Women's voices.

Their photographs highlight the pervasiveness of conservative politics, illustrated by giant billboards and anti-abortion slogans proliferating along the roadsides. The isolation of racial and social minorities also emerges from their portraits of indigenous people, particularly in Florida. "Much of the poverty in this area has been pushed out of the scenic seaside route and lies behind Miami around the sugar cane fields," they say.



U.S. Route 1 to Logan airport Boston 2023 © Anna Fox and Karen Knorr



Manor, Swainsboro, Georgia, 2017. © Anna Fox and Karen Knorr



Monument, Balsam Valley, Maine, 2023. © Anna Fox and Karen Knorr



Gifford 2024 © Anna Fox and Karen Knorr

The stories of the abandoned people they met on Route 1, like those of the homeless veterans, are just as poignant. "It's unbelievable to think that despite fighting for their country and risking their lives for their people they can be abandoned as they have been and left to beg on the streets," they say, referring to the tents that line the streets of Washington, D.C. "The "American Dream" seems quite broken."

"We were shocked by the nature of the gun culture in the U.S.," they continue. Their portrait of a porter in a hotel with guns strapped to both sides of his body or the "we shoot to kill" sign outside a home they photographed illustrate this pervasive climate of violence. "Of course, we have heard of it through the news but to come up face to face with it on the street and in people's houses is a real wake up call."

It's not all doom and gloom, though. Fox and Knorr also share touching anecdotes, such as that of an elderly couple, one of whom is a cancer survivor, taking their first road trip. "They were living now to fulfill their dreams", they say, evoking the beauty of small human victories amidst struggles. A bit of balm to the heart of a largely disenchanted America.

The exhibition "U.S. Route 1" is on view at the Archevêché in Arles until October 5, 2025. The book U.S.1 After Berenice Abbott (2025) is available from Trolley Books.



Main Street, Fort Kent 2024 © Anna Fox and Karen Knorr