

Alexa Vachon  
Application for the 2019 IWPA Award

## Artist Statement

### RISE

18-year-old Sana wakes up every day at 6am in the apartment she shares with her three sisters and mother on the outskirts of Berlin. She rides the S-Bahn 45 minutes across town and shows up for class by 8am. In school she learns history, geography and math but mostly she learns German. It's a far cry from her life in Kabul, Afghanistan where, instead of going to school or learning how to read and write, she worked as a hairdresser. Now, five days a week Sana goes to school. Once a week she leaves school and puts on borrowed football cleats to join her teammates at Champions ohne Grenzen, a football team for refugee women in Berlin, Germany. The players come from Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Somalia and Albania. For most of them, this is the first time they have ever played football.

RISE is a photo and text based book project exploring the players' experiences both on and off the field – at home, with family, navigating German bureaucracy and growing as they become contributing members of their communities. In Berlin since the mass wave of migration in 2015, the women have spent the past few years learning German, going to school and establishing new lives. Two years in the making, the final work combines photography, journals, texts, interviews, poems and drawings in exhibition and book form. It is an intimate portrait of a group of young women and the highs and lows inherent in establishing a new life in a different culture.

*(252 Words)*

## Biography

Alexa Vachon is a Canadian born, New York educated, Berlin based photographer and photojournalist who works on assignment for various international publications and on long-term projects focusing on women's rights and human rights. Vachon was a 2018 finalist for the PH Museum Women Photograph Grant and a member of Women Photograph. She released her latest book, RISE in October 2018. She will continue her focus on women football players in 2019 in Iran, Pakistan and Kurdistan. In 2018 her work was shown at Organ Vida (ENGAGED, ACTIVE, AWARE), Arles (Family of No Man), Museum Schloss Doberlug (solo), 3hd (System.Lure), Sprechsaal and Kunsthaus Bethanien. She was recently selected for 2 week-long workshops with Alec Soth, and with Magnum and World Press Photo. In 2016-2017 she was a European Journalism Fellow at the Freie Universität. She has received grants from the VG-Bild Kunst, the Canada Council for the Arts, the German Football Association and the US Embassy Berlin. In 2016, she self-published her first book called 'what we do in the light,' an exploration of queer and feminist pornography. In 2017 Rabid Records released her book following The Knife on their final European tour. She graduated from The School of Visual Arts (NYC) and completed the Master Class at the Ostkreuzschule für Fotografie (Berlin). Her work has appeared in many international magazines and newspapers and she has been profiled in numerous online and print publications.

*(233 Words)*