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# Ice-assisted electron-beam lithography for halide perovskite optoelectronic nanodevices

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# ABSTRACT

Metal halide perovskites (MHPs) have received substantial attention due to their impressive optoelectronic properties. In particular, nanoscale perovskite structures, such as nanowires (NWs) and nanoplates (NPs) are ideal building blocks for optoelectronic devices. However, metal electrodes can be hardly patterned on these materials with conventional lithographic methods due to the solvent sensitivity of perovskite crystals and alignment issues. Here, we report a solvent-free method to fabricate metal electrodes on perovskite NPs, which starts with the vapor deposition of water ice as an electron resist and ends in the sublimation of the ice followed by a "blow-off" process. The good compatibility between MHPs and ice as well as the in-situ imaging and patterning process guarantees the fabrication with high precision and resolution. Using this technique, we create metal electrodes on single-crystal MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> NPs featuring a nanoscale gap of 296 nm and superior photo-detection ability with responsivity of 653 A/W and detectivity of  $3.08 \times 10^{13}$  Jones. Our study helps the widely-used electron-beam lithography break down barriers in processing perovskite materials, and provides an excellent platform to fully exploit their potentials in optoelectronic devices.

# 1. Introduction

The development of optoelectronic nanodevices is inseparable from the exploration of new semiconductor materials and innovative processing techniques [1,2]. As one class of promising semiconductors, organic-inorganic hybrid halide perovskites (MAPbX<sub>3</sub>, MA=CH<sub>3</sub>NH<sub>3</sub><sup>+</sup>, X=Cl<sup>-</sup>, Br<sup>-</sup>, I<sup>-</sup>) are of particular interest due to their large light absorption coefficient, long carrier diffusion length and high carrier mobility [3-5]. These impressive properties make perovskites excellent semiconductors for solar cells, photodetector, LEDs and lasers. Besides, processing temperature of perovskite materials is quite low (less than 150 °C), enabling them to integrate with plastic or polymer substrates for flexible devices. In contrast to conventional vacuum processing, all-solution based synthetic route enables the production of single-crystalline perovskites with excellent optoelectronic properties [6-9]. However, the solubility of perovskites is also somewhat of a double-edge sword. It is thus difficult to make electrodes on perovskites through solution-processing steps [10–12]. For instance, electron-beam lithography (EBL) is currently the most widespread and reliable manufacturing method for fabricating electrodes when nanoscale dimensions are needed [13,14]. The technique requires a standard process including spin-coating, electron-beam (e-beam) patterning, chemical development, metal deposition and lift-off. Unfortunately, abundant polar solvents such as anisole, methyl isobutyl ketone, isopropyl alcohol and acetone, which can readily degrade the perovskite crystals, are inevitably employed in the lithographic process.

Reducing exposure to solvents in nanofabrication is thus the first essential to build perovskite nanodevices. A simplistic approach to

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patterning on perovskites is utilizing area-selective deposition through a shadow mask or stencil where metals can be evaporated directly onto perovskites in a desired pattern [15-20]. Mechanical transfer of perovskites to prepatterned structures alternatively meets such an expectation. But both methods have limitations in positioning and alignment during nanofabrication. Recently, efforts have been made to optimize the standard EBL process for developing a perovskite-compatible lithography method with nanoscale precision. Orthogonal lithography by substituting high polar solvents (isopropyl alcohol and acetone) with the low polar (chlorobenzene: dissolving resist; hexane: resist development) successfully fabricated 2D perovskite photodetectors featuring excellent photoresponse [21]. A perovskite photodetector can also be obtained by employing a double layer of resists with different molecular weights [22]. Despite plenty of advancements, solvents are not avoided in these strategies, leading to complicated nanofabrication procedures with a high risk of damaging perovskite structures.

Here, we demonstrate that ice-assisted EBL (iEBL) [23,24], utilizing water ice as an electron resist, can easily fabricate nanoscale metal patterns onto perovskites. It is an utterly solvent-free procedure which starts with vapor deposition of water ice and ends in the sublimation of the ice followed by a "blow-off" process. Only water ice involved indicates no resist contamination in the whole procedure, which is a major concern in conventional lithography methods. Moreover, advantages of in-situ imaging and patterning in iEBL guarantee accurate positioning of fabricated nanostructures. After carefully investigating the compatibility between perovskites and water ice, we have fabricated a perovskite photodetector featuring nanoscale patterned electrodes and superior photodetection ability with responsivity of 653 A/W and detectivity of  $3.08 \times 10^{13}$  Jones. Our study provides a simple, efficient, and eco-friendly way for constructing nanostructures on perovskites. It can be well integrated with traditional semiconductor manufacturing processes, beneficial to fully exploit potentials of perovskites in



**Fig. 1.** Characterization of MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> NPs. (a-c) Optical images MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> NPs showing the thickness-dependent colors. (d) SEM image of MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> NP with thickness of 300 nm. (e) AFM images of MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> NP with thickness of 300 nm and (f and g) monolayer height profile. EDS mapping of (h) Br and (i) Pb elements. (j) XRD pattern of MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> NPs. (k) PL spectrum of MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> NPs.

optoelectronic devices.

## 2. Results and discussion

The space-confined growth method is used to obtain singlecrystalline MAPbBr3 NPs with controllable thickness down to a few hundred nanometers [25-29]. In this process, the confined space is constructed by a hydrophilic and a hydrophobic Si/SiO<sub>2</sub> substrates (Figs. S1 and S2). The thickness of MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> is well-defined by the pressure applied to the substrates. As illustrated in Fig. 1a-c, MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> NPs with various thickness in nanometer range exhibit characteristic colors due to the effect of thin film interference (Fig. S3). This simple and direct visual inspection helps us harvest a certain thickness film to meet diverse applications [30-32]. The scanning electron microscope (SEM) image discloses the smooth surface that is free of domain and grain boundaries (Fig. 1d). Atomic force microscopy (AFM) studies show that the green MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> NP exhibits a film thickness of  $\sim$ 300 nm (Fig. 1e) and a nearly atomically flat surface with a room-mean-square roughness of ~0.443 nm. Moreover, a monolayer of a cubic MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> unit cell with a height  $\sim 0.6$  nm is also observed in Fig. 1f and g. The energy-dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (EDS) mapping image indicates the uniform distribution of Br and Pb elements with the composition ratio close to the theoretical value (Fig. 1h and i). X-ray diffraction (XRD) also confirms the high purity of MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> crystal in cubic phase (Fig. 1j). Fig. 1k shows the photoluminescence (PL) spectrum with a single emission peak at ~535 nm, consistent with the band-edge emission in MAPbBr<sub>3</sub>. The obtained MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> NPs with smooth surface and high degree crystallinity is essential for ensuring an intimate contacting with the electrodes to enable the formation of ohmic contacts.

Generally, the presence of liquid water leads to the irreversible decomposition of MAPbX<sub>3</sub> to PbX<sub>2</sub> [33-35]. In contrast to liquid water, moisture in the form of ambient humidity is beneficial to heal the defect

states of MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> through hydrogen bonding or partial solvation of methylammonium component [36,37]. In our experiment, we first verify whether single-crystalline MAPbBr3 NP is compatible with ice deposition. Water vapor was sprayed on the surface of MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> NP to form a uniform film of amorphous ice at 130 K (see Supplementary Information for details) [23], and the MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> NP was imaged in situ underneath the ice (Fig. 2a). Then the ice was heated to room temperature in a vacuum. It is worth noting that the ice was directly vaporized without the formation of liquid water during such a heating process (as marked in Fig. S4). We performed X-ray diffraction (XRD) and photoluminescence (PL) spectra measurements before ice deposition and after ice sublimation. As shown in Fig. 2b and c, there were no detectable changes in XRD or PL spectra. Moreover, time-resolved PL (TRPL) measurements show negligible changes in carrier lifetime between original and ice-treated MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> nanoplate (Fig. S5). It indicates that neither the ice deposition nor sublimation process affects the trap-related carrier combination of perovskite crystals. We also examined the compatibility between MAPbBr3 NP and solvents involved in processing conventional PMMA resists. In contrast, after immersing MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> NPs into these solvents (anisole, MIBK & IPA, IPA and acetone) for 1 min, their PL emission intensity were significantly weakened or even disappeared, and the crystals were eroded or dissolved, as demonstrated in Fig. 2d-k. These comparisons prove the superiority of iEBL on processing perovskites over conventional lithography methods. To demonstrate the general applicability of iEBL, we deposited ice resist on polycrystalline MAPbI<sub>3</sub> film. As shown in Fig. S6, the morphology of MAPbI<sub>3</sub> did not change and the grains were still densely stacked after ice sublimation. Furthermore, the PL and absorbance spectra also confirm the compatibility between MAPbI<sub>3</sub> film and ice resist.

Fig. 3a illustrates our iEBL processes for fabricating metal electrodes on MAPbBr<sub>3</sub>. We chose MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> with appropriate thickness (300 nm) to prevent cracks forming during cooling it down to 130 K (Fig. S7).



**Fig. 2.** Compatibility tests of MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> with ice and conventional solvents. (a) SEM images of MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> NP at room temperature and after cooling down, ice deposition and ice sublimation by rewarming to room temperature. Scale bar: 1 μm. (b) XRD and (c) PL spectra of MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> NP before ice deposition and after ice sublimation. Insets are optical images. Scale bar: 100 μm. Optical images and PL spectra of MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> NP before and after immersion in (d, h) anisole, (e, i) MIBK and IPA, (f, j) IPA and (g, k) acetone. Scale bar: 100 μm.



Fig. 3. IEBL fabrication process. (a) Schematic diagram for creating metal electrodes on MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> NP by iEBL. SEM images of (b) MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> NP with ice, (c) e-beam exposure on ice, (d) curly metal film before dry lift-off and (f) resultant electrodes with (g) magnified electrode gap of 296 nm and (h) 317 nm. (e) Optical image of MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> NP with electrodes.

Large-area metal pads were pre-deposited on the MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> through a shadow mask to improve the processing efficiency. Water vapor was subsequently injected onto the MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> to form a uniform film of amorphous ice with thickness of 300 nm (Fig. S8). Attributed to the advantage of in-situ imaging (Fig. 3b and c), we could directly perform e-beam exposure at desired areas and inspect the as-fabricated ice pattern immediately. Here, we employed low-energy electrons of 2 keV for patterning due to its small penetration depth of electrons as well as high yield of secondary electrons [38,39]. Dose tests were conducted (Fig. S9) in advance to determine the critical dose that just completely removed the ice without damages to the underlying perovskite. After

metallization at a cryogenic temperature, the MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> was heated to room temperature to sublimate the ice. Temperature of the ice might slightly rise during the metallization process (thermal evaporation of Au). However, it did not affect the performance of the perovskite film since no liquid water formed. More SEM images for the iEBL process can be seen in Fig. S10. Finally, the residual metal film was curled and separated from the sample (Fig. 3d), which can be blown off by nitrogen gas easily. The whole iEBL process did not involve any solvents, ensuring no chemical residue and detrimental reaction with perovskite. The final electrode structure with gaps of 296 nm and 317 nm were successfully fabricated on MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> NP (Fig. 3e-h).

It is acknowledged that decreasing carrier transmission distance between the source and drain electrodes while maintaining the external quantum yield and absorption can improve the sensitivity and responsivity of a photodetector simultaneously [40,41]. In this paper, a photoconductive MAPbBr3 photodetector with a small channel width of 296 nm has been obtained through the iEBL technique (Fig. 4a-b). Current-voltage (I-V) curves of the photodetector under dark and upon illumination (Fig. 4c and Fig. S11) imply its sensitive photoelectrical response from the ultraviolet to visible region. Fig. 4d shows good stability and fast photoresponse of the MAPbBr3 photodetector after dozens of on/off switching cycles at different bias voltages of 0 V, 1 V and 3 V. When fixing the bias voltage between two electrodes at 3 V, we further obtain *I-V* curves of the photodetector under 450-nm light illumination with an irradiance varying from 12.5 to 2855  $\mu$ W/cm<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 4e). The linear I-V behavior indicates good ohmic contact between the gold electrode and MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> (Fig. 4f), confirming the feasibility of iEBL technique for fabricating perovskite-based optoelectronic devices. Moreover, linearity features of the logarithmic power-photocurrent and power-responsivity curves in Fig. 4g suggest a large linear dynamic range of our MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> photodetector.

Responsivity ( $R_{\lambda}$ ), detectivity ( $D^*$ ) and external quantum efficiency (*EQE*) are widely used to evaluate the performance of photodetectors in

terms of sensitivity, signal-to-noise ratio and photoelectric conversion efficiency of the device. They can be calculated by the following formula:

$$R_{\lambda} = \frac{I_{ph} - I_{dark}}{P_{\lambda}S}$$
$$D^* = \frac{R_{\lambda}}{\sqrt[2]{2eI_{dark}/S}}$$
$$EQE = \frac{hc}{hc} \frac{R_{\lambda}}{2}$$

where *e*, *h* and *c* represent the elementary charge, Plank constant and the light velocity,

considering the illumination wavelength ( $\lambda$ ), light power density ( $P_{\lambda}$ ), photocurrent ( $I_{ph}$ ), dark current ( $I_{dark}$ ) and effective illumination area (S) of the photodetector. Fig. 4 h and i display these three parameters of our photodetector illuminated at different light wavelengths. In fact, under the radiation intensity of 12.5  $\mu$ W/cm<sup>2</sup> and the bias voltage of 3 V, the maximum of  $R_{\lambda}$ ,  $D^*$  and EQE can reach 653 A/W, 3.08 × 10<sup>13</sup> Jones and 180200%, respectively. Such an excellent detection performance is attributed to the formation of high-quality electrode-perovskite



**Fig. 4.** Structure and characteristics of MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> photodetectors. (a) IEBL fabrication process of MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> photodetector. i: in situ e-beam exposure on ice resist; ii: metallization at 130 K; iii: residual metal films separate from the substrate after ice sublimation. iv: blown off by nitrogen gas. (b) SEM image of the MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> photodetector with a 296-nm-wide gap. (c) Semi-logarithmic *I-V* curves under dark and illumination at various light wavelengths. (d) Semi-logarithmic *I-t* curves under 450 nm illumination with on/off switching at voltage of 0, 1, and 3 V. (e) Light intensity-dependent semi-logarithmic *I-V* curves under 450 nm illumination. (f) Linear *I-V* curves of MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> photodetectors at different light irradiation. (g) Photocurrent and responsivity as a function of photodensity for MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> photodetectors. (h) Responsivity and detectivity and (i) EQE curves as a function of wavelength for MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> photodetectors.

interface and quite small electrode gap. Detailed comparisons to other MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> photodetectors fabricated through shadow mask deposition or transfer methods can be found in Table S1 in the Supplementary Information. It has been known that both responsivity and detectivity of a detector are related to illumination area. Although perovskites outside the electrode area can produce carriers under laser illumination, directional movement of carriers is quite difficult without external electric field. The responsivity and detectivity of our photodetector and those in Table S1 are estimated using the area between electrodes rather than that of the laser spot as effective illumination area.

#### 3. Conclusion

We have demonstrated the fabrication of high-performance MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> photodetectors through developing iEBL technique. Water ice has been verified to be compatible with perovskite materials and it can be used as an effective resist for electron-beam patterning without damaging the underlying perovskite. High responsivity of 653 A/W and detectivity of more than  $3 \times 10^{13}$  jones have been obtained in a single MAPbBr<sub>3</sub> nanoplate device, attributed to the utterly solvent-free nanofabrication and in-situ imaging and pattering procedure in iEBL. We anticipate that the proposed iEBL process would open the door for achieving perovskite-integrated electronic and optoelectronic systems.

# CRediT authorship contribution statement

Binbin Jin: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing-Original draft preparation.Yu Hong: Conceptualization, Methodology. Ziqing Li: Methodology, Data curation, Formal analysis. Ding Zhao: Supervision, Visualization, Writing-Reviewing and Editing. Yihan Lu: Investigation. Guangnan Yao: Investigation. Rui Zheng: Investigation. Gang Bi: Visualization, Writing-Reviewing and Editing. Qing Zhang: Visualization, Writing-Reviewing and Editing. Xiaosheng Fang: Visualization, Resources, Writing-Reviewing and Editing. Min Qiu: Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition.

#### **Declaration of Competing Interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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## Appendix A. Supporting information

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found in the online version at doi:10.1016/j.nanoen.2022.107692.

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