





Biologically inspired supramolecular materials

Inaugural Lecture by Rudolf Mößbauer Tenure Track Professor Job Boekhoven

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The use of self-assembly has proven powerful for materials science resulting in a variety of new structures to address challenges in fields like healthcare and energy conversion. Prominent examples include the self-assembled liquid crystals in LCDs and organized lipids in drug delivery devices. However, when it comes to functionality, adaptivity and complexity, such artificial supramolecular materials are vastly outcompeted by the highly sophisticated self-assembled machinery found in natural systems, such as the biological cell. In this talk, I will identify two approaches to create more sophisticated supramolecular materials inspired by the complexity of the biological cell. First, one crucial difference between biological structures and man-made materials lies in their energy balance. While most materials are at a thermo-dynamic minimum, biological architectures are open and can only be maintained by constant consumption of energy. I will discuss materials inspired by this non-equilibrium nature of biology which resulted in active, intrinsically dynamic structures that can be controlled over space and time.

The topic of a second part of this talk remains out-of-equilibrium, however, closer to a thermodynamic minimum. Inspired by protein folding as observed biology, we have set out to explore the energy landscapes of self-assembled materials. We found that, similar to proteins, self-assembled structures can exist in one of several thermodynamically favored minimums, that are separated from one another by an energy barrier. This energy landscape implies that a single self-assembling building block that, under the exact same conditions (pH, temperature, concentration), can from more than one nanostructure. Naturally, each assembled architecture has drastically different material properties.



Self-assembled peptide nanofibers imaged by fluorescence microscopy



There will be a reception after the lecture.

Speaker: Prof. Dr. Job Boekhoven Supramolecular Chemistry TUM Institute for Advanced Study and Department of Chemistry BoekhovenLab.com

Technische Universität München · Institute for Advanced Study

Lichtenbergstraße 2 a · 85748 Garching · Tel +49.89.289.10550 · Fax +49.89.289.10699 · info@tum-ias.de · www.tum-ias.de