



US010883189B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Soares et al.

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 10,883,189 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Jan. 5, 2021**

(54) **FLEX PLATE WITH REMOVABLE INSERTS AND COVER**

(71) Applicant: **Brookhaven Science Associates, LLC**,
Upton, NY (US)

(72) Inventors: **Alexei S. Soares**, Shirley, NY (US);
Karan Joshi, Eatontown, NJ (US);
Grace C. Shea-McCarthy, Shoreham,
NY (US); **Ella Teplitsky**, Suffern, NY
(US)

(73) Assignee: **BROOKHAVEN SCIENCE ASSOCIATES, LLC**, Upton, NY (US)

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **16/922,777**

(22) Filed: **Jul. 7, 2020**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**
US 2020/0340136 A1 Oct. 29, 2020

Related U.S. Application Data

(62) Division of application No. 15/541,782, filed as application No. PCT/US2016/012567 on Jan. 8, 2016, now Pat. No. 10,753,834.

(60) Provisional application No. 62/100,962, filed on Jan. 8, 2015.

(51) **Int. Cl.**
C30B 7/14 (2006.01)
C30B 29/58 (2006.01)
C07K 1/30 (2006.01)
G01N 23/207 (2018.01)
G01N 1/28 (2006.01)
C07H 21/00 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC **C30B 7/14** (2013.01); **C07K 1/306** (2013.01); **C30B 29/58** (2013.01); **G01N 1/2806** (2013.01); **G01N 23/2076** (2013.01); **C07H 21/00** (2013.01); **G01N 2223/307** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
CPC **C30B 7/14**; **C30B 29/58**; **C07K 1/306**;
G01N 1/2806; **G01N 23/2076**; **G01N 2223/307**; **C07H 21/00**
USPC **23/300**
See application file for complete search history.

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Primary Examiner — Edward M Johnson
(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Dorene M. Price

(57) **ABSTRACT**

Technologies are described for methods and systems effective for flex plates. The flex plates may comprise a base plate. The base plate may include walls that define an insert location opening in the base plate. The insert location opening in the base plate may be in communication with a securement area. The flex plates may comprise an insert. The insert may include a reservoir region and a crystallization region separated by a wall including channels. The reservoir region and the crystallization region may include a backing. The insert may further include securement tabs. The securement tabs may be configured to secure the insert to the base plate at the securement area.

14 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets

Fig. 1

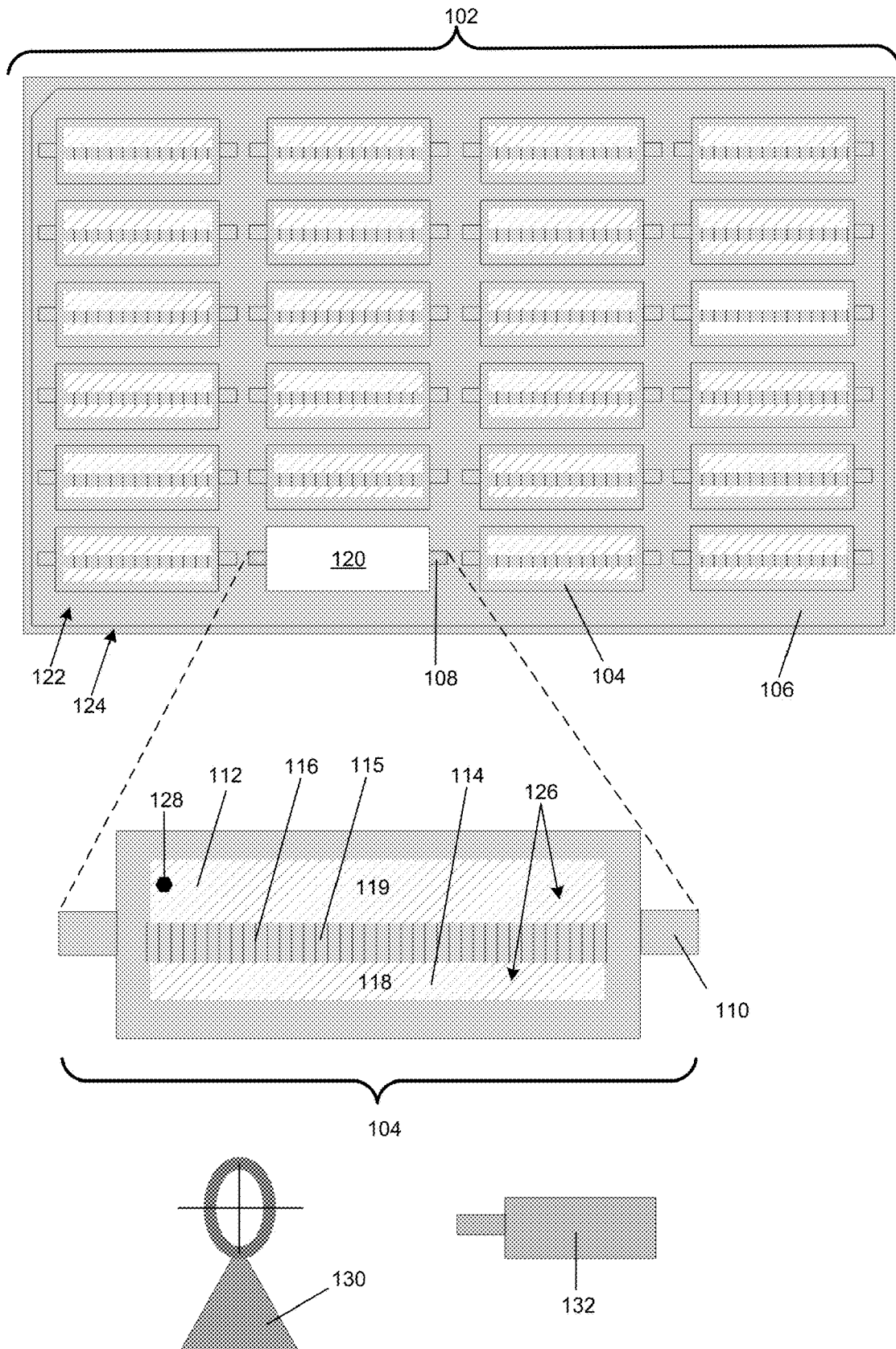


Fig. 2

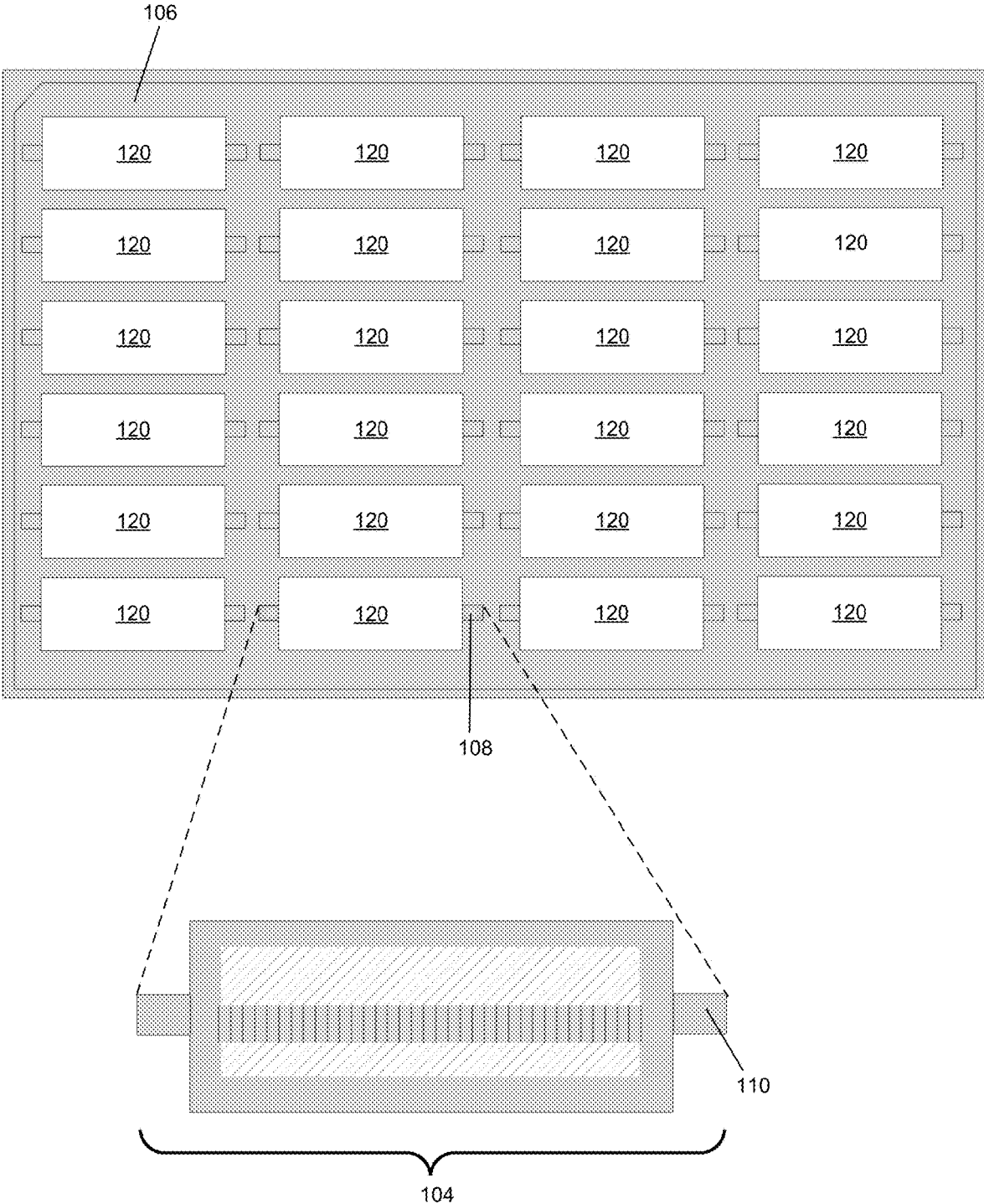


Fig. 3

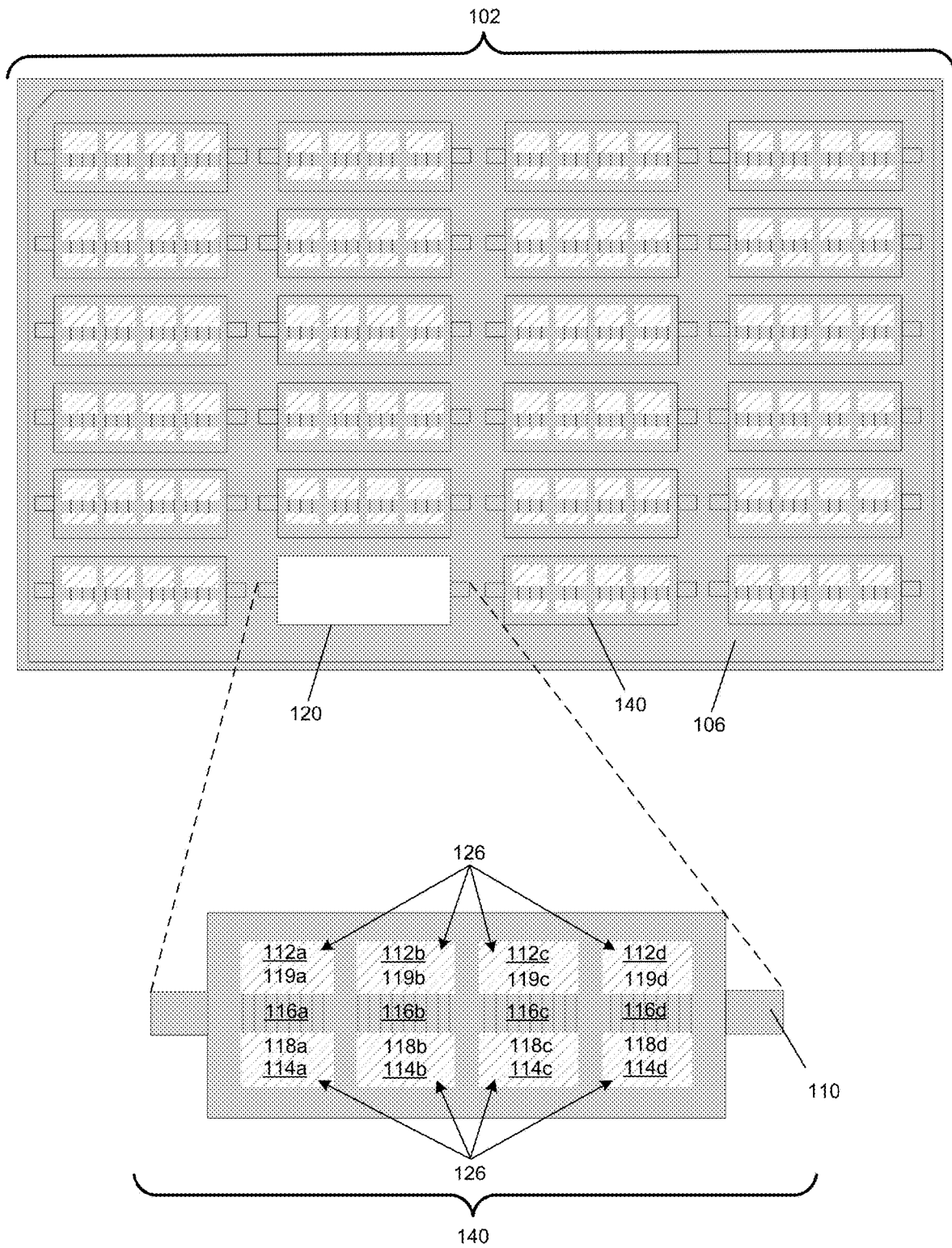


Fig. 4

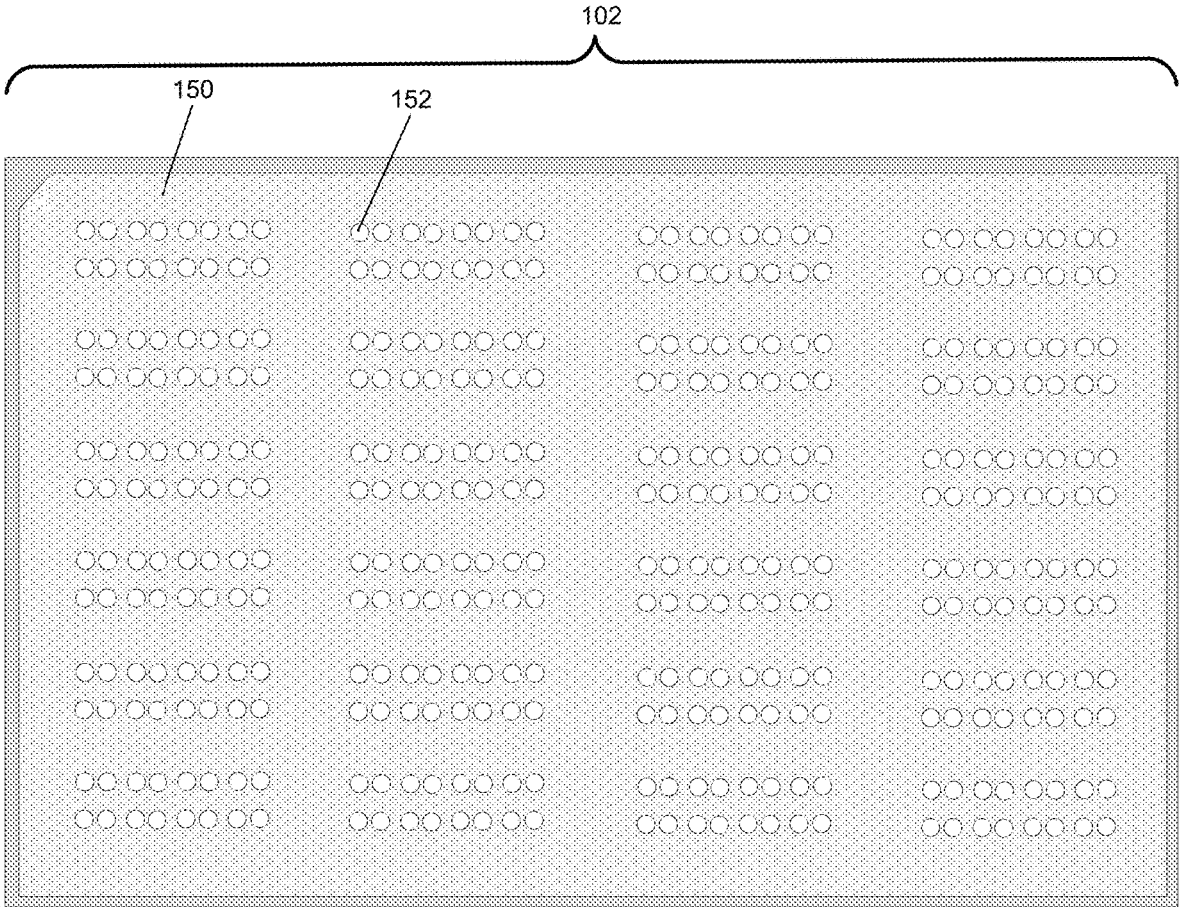
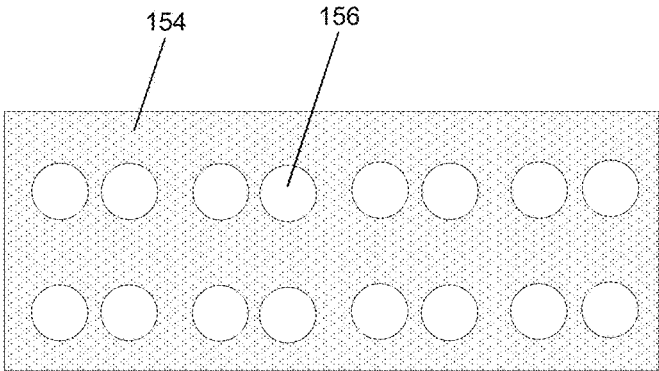


Fig. 5



FLEX PLATE WITH REMOVABLE INSERTS AND COVER

This application is a divisional application of U.S. application Ser. No. 15/541,782, filed on Jul. 6, 2017, which claims benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 62/100,962 filed on Jan. 8, 2015, the contents of each of which are incorporated herein by reference in their entirety.

The present application was made with government support under contract number DE-SC0012704 awarded by the U.S. Department of Energy. The United States government has certain rights in the invention(s).

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This disclosure relates generally to a tray for growing crystals such as proteins, nucleic acids, and/or carbohydrates. Crystals grown in crystallization trays may be analyzed for applications involving drug design and for controlling drug delivery.

BACKGROUND

Molecules such as proteins, nucleic acids, and/or carbohydrates may be crystallized in order to study the crystalline structure to obtain detail about the molecules' function. Crystallization may be performed by providing a preparation of a solution of a target compound and altering the environment of the dissolved target compound to make the target compound revert to its solid form as a crystal. A precipitate may be introduced into the environment to make the target compound less soluble and to induce crystallization.

SUMMARY

In some examples, flex plates are generally described. The flex plates may comprise a base plate. The base plate may include walls that define an insert location opening in the base plate. The insert location opening in the base plate may be in communication with a securement area. The flex plates may comprise an insert. The insert may include a reservoir region and a crystallization region separated by a wall including channels. The reservoir region and the crystallization region may include a backing. The insert may further include securement tabs. The securement tabs may be configured to secure the insert to the base plate at the securement area.

In some examples, methods to make samples are generally described. The methods may comprise placing a preparation within a crystallization region of an insert secured to a base plate. The methods may comprise placing a precipitant within a reservoir region of the insert. The reservoir region may be separated from the crystallization region by walls defining channels. The methods may comprise allowing vapor from the precipitant to achieve equilibrium between the reservoir region and the crystallization region. The methods may comprise removing the insert from the base plate. The methods may comprise placing the insert into a testing device to test the sample.

In some examples, flex plates are generally described. The flex plates may comprise a base plate wherein the base plate includes walls that define an insert location opening in the base plate. The insert location opening may be in communication with a securement area. The flex plates may comprise an insert. The insert may include a reservoir region and a crystallization region separated by a wall including channels. The reservoir region and the crystallization region may

include a backing. The insert may further include securement tabs. The securement tabs may be configured to secure the insert to the base plate at the securement area. The flex plates may comprise a cover. The cover may include an adhesive sheet configured to cover the flex plate and define holes. The holes may be configured such that preparation and precipitant may be placed in at least one of the crystallization region and the reservoir region through the cover.

The foregoing summary is illustrative only and is not intended to be in any way limiting. In addition to the illustrative aspects, embodiments, and features described above, further aspects, embodiments, and features will become apparent by reference to the drawings and the following detailed description.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

The foregoing and other features of this disclosure will become more fully apparent from the following description and appended claims, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings. Understanding that these drawings depict only several embodiments in accordance with the disclosure and are, therefore, not to be considered limiting of its scope, the disclosure will be described with additional specificity and detail through use of the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 illustrates an example flex plate with a removable insert removed;

FIG. 2 illustrates an example base plate with a removable insert removed;

FIG. 3 illustrates an example flex plate including a base plate with removable inserts with multiple reservoir regions and with a removable insert removed;

FIG. 4 illustrates an example flex plate cover;

FIG. 5 illustrates an example insert cover;

all arranged according to at least some embodiments described herein.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

In the following detailed description, reference is made to the accompanying drawings, which form a part hereof. In the drawings, similar symbols typically identify similar components, unless context dictates otherwise. The illustrative embodiments described in the detailed description, drawings, and claims are not meant to be limiting. Other embodiments may be utilized, and other changes may be made, without departing from the spirit or scope of the subject matter presented herein. It will be readily understood that the aspects of the present disclosure, as generally described herein, and illustrated in the Figures, can be arranged, substituted, combined, separated, and designed in a wide variety of different configurations, all of which are explicitly contemplated herein.

As used herein, any compound, material or substance which expressly or implicitly disclosed in the specification and/or recited in a claim as belonging to a group or structurally, compositionally and/or functionally related compounds, materials or substances, includes individual representatives of the group and all combinations thereof.

FIG. 1 illustrates an example flex plate with a removable insert removed, arranged in accordance with at least some embodiments presented herein. As discussed in more detail below, a flex plate used for crystal growth may include removable inserts which may be removed from the flex plate and utilized for in situ data collection.

Flex plate **102** may be a crystal growth plate used to grow crystals such as proteins, nucleic acids, and/or carbohydrates. Flex plate **102** may include a base plate **106** and multiple fragments or removable inserts **104**. Flex plate **102**, including base plate **106**, and fragments or removable inserts **104** may be made from a polymer material such as acrylonitrile-butadiene-styrene copolymer, polycarbonate, polydimethylsiloxane (PDMS), polyethylene (PE), polymethylmethacrylate (PMMA), polymethylpentene, polypropylene, polystyrene, polysulfone, polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE), polyurethane (PU), polyvinylchloride (PVC), polyvinylidene chloride (PVDC), polyvinylidene fluoride, styrene-acryl copolymers, polyisoprene, polybutadiene, polychloroprene, polyisobutylene, poly(styrene-butadiene-styrene), silicones, epoxy resins, poly ether block amide, polyester, acrylonitrile butadiene styrene (ABS), acrylic, celluloid, cellulose acetate, ethylene-vinyl acetate (EVA), ethylene vinyl alcohol (EVAL), fluoroplastics, polyacetal (POM), polyacrylates (acrylic), polyacrylonitrile (PAN), polyamide (PA), polyamide-imide (PAI), polyaryletherketone (PARK), polybutadiene (PBD), polybutylene (PB), polybutylene terephthalate (PBT), polyethylene terephthalate (PET), polycyclohexylene dimethylene terephthalate (PCT), polyketone (PK), polyester/polythene/polyethene, poly etheretherketone (PEEK), polyetherimide (PEI), polyethersulfone (PES), polyethylenechlorinates (PEC), polyimide (PI), polylactic acid (PLA), polymethylpentene (PMP), polyphenylene oxide (PPO), polyphenylene sulfide (PPS), polyphthalamide (PPA), and mixtures thereof.

Insert **104** may include securement tabs **110**, walls defining a crystallization region **112**, walls defining a reservoir region **114**, and walls defining channels **116**. Insert **104** may include transparent backing **126** that may be adhered to both crystallization region **112** and to reservoir region **114**. Transparent backing **126** may be adhered to an underside of insert **104** and may be transparent to electromagnetic radiation such as x-rays. Securement tabs **110** may secure insert **104** to base plate **106** through a mating between securement tabs **110** and a securement area **108** defined by walls in base plate **106**. Securement tabs **110** may secure insert **104** to base plate **106** such that insert **104** may be removed or disassembled from base plate **106**. Securement of insert **104** to base plate **106** may be performed by any securement method, including, dovetailing, snap-in, friction fit, sockets, etc. Securement tabs **110** may also be compatible with adapters for goniometers.

Base plate **106** may include walls which define insert location openings **120**. Insert location openings **120** may communicate with securement area **108**. Insert **104** may be secured within insert location openings **120** when securement tabs **110** mate with securement areas **108**. Flex plate **102** may include base plate **106** with a respective insert **104** secured within each insert location opening **120**. Flex plate **102**, including inserts **104** secured in flex plate base **106**, may be used to grow protein crystals for protein crystallography. Base plate **106** of flex plate **102** may include a raised area **122** above a pedestal **124**. Flex plate **102** may be about 128 mm in length (at longest point on pedestal **124**), by about 85.5 mm in width (at widest point on pedestal **124**), by about 11.5 mm high (total height of pedestal **124** and raised area **122**). Flex plate **102** may be configured to have preparations and precipitants applied to crystallization region **112** and precipitant region **114** respectively, by protein crystallography automated equipment.

Crystallization region **112** of insert **104** may be separated from reservoir region **114** by wall **115**. Wall **115** may prevent liquid precipitant **118** from crossing from reservoir region

114 to crystallization region **112**. Channels **116** may be defined by wall **115** along a top edge of wall **115**, Channels **116** may be grooves within the top edge of wall **115** running between reservoir region **114** and crystallization region **112** and may allow air and vapor of precipitant **118** to flow between reservoir region **114** and crystallization region **112**. Crystallization region **112** of each insert **104** may accommodate chemical screening preparations. A liquid handling system, such as acoustic droplet ejection (ADE) may be operated in connection with flex plate **102** and insert **104** to place preparations **119** within crystallization region **112**. Crystallization region **112** may accommodate over 81 distinct chemical screening preparations. Reservoir region **114** may include precipitant **118**. Precipitant **118** may be any precipitant used in protein crystallography, including but not limited to, poly ethylene glycol (PEG) 600, PFG 4K, PEG 10K, $(\text{NH}_4)_2\text{SO}_4$, PO_4 , and citrate. Precipitant **118** in vapor form may diffuse across channels **116** to crystallization region **112**. Precipitant **118** in vapor form may achieve equilibrium between reservoir region **114** and crystallization region **112**. Precipitant vapor equilibrium may take a time period, such as 24 hours and crystals may form in crystallization region **112**. As discussed in more detail below, a cover may be placed over insert **104** or flex plate **102**, including multiple inserts, to prevent loss of precipitate when preparation volumes are of nanoliter scale.

Upon formation of crystals **128**, or at an end of crystal preparation, if no crystal forms, the flex plate cover may be removed from flex plate **102** and insert **104**. Flex plate **102** may be covered with an x-ray transparent adhesive plastic plate cover. The adhesive plastic plate cover may be cut with a razor blade such that each insert **104** is separated from other inserts **104**. Each insert **104** may be removed or disassembled from base plate **106**. Insert **104** may provide for in situ data collecting, as securement tabs **110** of insert **104** may be placed within standard mounts for a goniometer **130**. Goniometer **130** and x-ray source **132** may thus perform x-ray analysis of samples from within crystalline region **112** of insert **104** while samples are within insert **104**.

FIG. 2 illustrates an example base plate with a removable insert removed, arranged in accordance with at least some embodiments presented herein. Those components in FIG. 2 that are labeled identically to components of FIG. 1 will not be described again for the purposes of clarity.

As previously discussed, base plate **106** may include walls defining insert location openings **120** and securement areas **108**. A size of insert **104**, as well as location and patterning of inserts **104** within base plate **106** may be varied based on chemical libraries to be used as preparation. In an example, 96 chemicals may be used in 8x12 layouts. Base plates **106** may be configured to accommodate from 1 to 64 inserts **104** in any configuration of 1-16 rows and 1-16 columns, for example, 5 rows by 2 columns, 5 rows by 4 columns, 6 rows by 4 columns, 8 rows by 4 columns, etc.

FIG. 3 illustrates an example flex plate including a base plate with removable inserts with multiple reservoir regions and with a removable insert removed, arranged in accordance with at least some embodiments presented herein. Those components in FIG. 3 that are labeled identically to components of FIGS. 1-2 will not be described again for the purposes of clarity.

Flex plate **102** may include base plate **106** with inserts **140** secured throughout base plate **106** such that an insert **140** is secured within all insert location openings **120** in base plate **106**. Flex plate **102** may be prepared with preparations and precipitants in crystallization region **112** and reservoir region **114** by hand or by automated measures such as ADE.

As described in more detail below, inserts **140** may be configured for more than one precipitant **118**. Flex plate **102** may include insert **140** with different configurations within base plate **106**, depending upon the criteria to be tested. For example, an insert **140** configured with one precipitate reservoir may be secured in base plate **106** next to an insert **140** configured with four precipitate reservoirs.

In an example, a protein crystallization experiment may desirably use more than one precipitant **118**. Insert **140** may be configured to include more than one reservoir region **114**, for example reservoir regions **114a**, **114b**, **114c**, and **114d**. Precipitants **118a**, **118b**, **118c**, and **118d** may be prepared and placed in each reservoir region respectively. Precipitants **118a**, **118b**, **118c**, and **118d**, in vapor form may diffuse across channels **116a**, **116b**, **116c**, and **116d** to crystallization regions **112a**, **112b**, **112c**, and **112d** respectively. Crystallization regions **112a**, **112b**, **112c**, and **112d** may each be prepared with preparations **119a**, **119b**, **119c**, and **119d** respectively. Preparations **119a**, **119b**, **119c**, and **119d** may be identical or different preparations. Preparations **119a**, **119b**, **119c**, and **119d** may grow crystals with precipitants **118a**, **118b**, **118c**, and **118d** respectively. A configuration of insert **140** may be determined based on preparation criteria and testing to be completed.

FIG. 4 illustrates an example flex plate cover, arranged in accordance with at least some embodiments herein. Those components in FIG. 4 that are labeled identically to components of FIGS. 1-3 will not be described again for the purposes of clarity.

Flex plate cover **150** may be an adhesive sheet and may cover over the entirety of flex plate **102**. Flex plate cover **150** may be transparent. Flex plate cover **150** may define holes **152**. Holes **152** may be configured to be located over reservoir regions **114** or crystallization regions **112** of any configuration of flex plate **102** such that preparation **119** and precipitant **118** may be placed within flex plate **102**. Flex plate cover **150** may prevent evaporation or loss of vapor precipitant during preparation and growing of crystals when preparation volumes are of nanoliter volumes. Flex plate cover **150** may cover about 96% of flex plate **102**. Flex plate cover **150** may be made from a polymer material such as acrylonitrile-butadiene-styrene copolymer, polycarbonate, polydimethylsiloxane (PDMS), polyethylene (PE), polymethylmethacrylate (PMMA), polymethylpentene, polypropylene, polystyrene, polysulfone, polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE), polyurethane (PU), polyvinylchloride (PVC), polyvinylidene chloride (PVDC), polyvinylidene fluoride, styrene-acryl copolymers polyisoprene, polybutadiene, polychloroprene, polyisobutylene, poly(styrene-butadiene-styrene), silicones, epoxy resins, poly ether block amide, polyester, acrylonitrile: butadiene styrene (ABS), acrylic, celluloid, cellulose acetate, ethylene-vinyl acetate (EVA), ethylene vinyl alcohol (EVAL), fluoroplastics, polyacetal (POM), polyacrylates (acrylic), polyacrylonitrile (PAN) polyamide (PA), polyamide-imide (PAI), polyaryletherketone (PAEK), polybutadiene (PBD), polybutylene (PB), polybutylene terephthalate (PBT), polyethylene terephthalate (PET), polycyclohexylene dimethylene terephthalate (PCT), polyketone (PK), poly ester/polythene/polyethene, polyetheretherketone (PEEK), polyetherimide (PEI), polyethersulfone (PES), polyethylenechlorinates (PEC), polyimide (PI), polylactic acid (PLA), polymethylpentene (PMP), polyphenylene oxide (PPO), polyphenylene sulfide (PPS), polyphthalamide (PPA), and mixtures thereof.

FIG. 5 illustrates an example insert cover, arranged in accordance with at least some embodiments herein, Insert cover **154** may be an adhesive sheet and may cover over the

entirety of insert **104**. Insert cover **154** may be transparent. Insert cover **154** may define holes **156**. Holes **156** may be configured to be located over reservoir regions **114** or crystallization regions **112** of any configuration of insert **104** such that preparation and precipitant may be placed within insert **104**. Insert cover **154** may prevent evaporation or loss of vapor precipitant during preparation and growing of crystals within insert **104** when preparation volumes are of nanoliter volumes.

In an example, flex plate **102** may be prepared with an ADE system. A chemical library may be placed by the ADE system at **81** locations in crystallization region **112** of one or more inserts **104** of flex plate **102**. Precipitant **118** may be placed in reservoir region **114** of one or more inserts **104** of flex plate **102**. Precipitant **118** may be placed with agar or allowed to soak into agar that has hardened in reservoir region **114**. Flex plate cover **150** may be placed over the flex plate **102** and equilibrium of precipitant vapor may be reached between reservoir region **114** and crystallization region **112**. Flex plate **102** may be placed in a container moistened with precipitant **118** to aid in reaching equilibrium.

Protein and precipitant **118** may be placed by ADE system in crystallization region **112** of one or more inserts **104** through holes **152** in flex plate cover **150**. Preparation **119** may include a chemical library, protein and precipitant **118** placed in crystallization region **112**. Equilibrium of precipitant **118** vapor may be reached between reservoir region **114** and crystallization region **112**. Flex plate **102** may be placed in a container moistened with precipitant **118** to aid in reaching equilibrium. Flex plate **102** may include about 800 or more co-crystallization experiments.

Cover **150** may be removed from flex plate **102**. Flex plate **102** may be covered with an x-ray transparent adhesive plastic plate cover. The adhesive plastic plate cover may be cut with a razor blade around each insert such that each insert **104** is separated from other inserts **104**. Inserts **104** may then be removed individually from base plate **106**. Each insert **104** may be placed onto a magnetic cap and x-ray data may be obtained with a goniometer.

In another example preparation **119** may include first growing a protein sample and then adding a chemical from a chemical library. In addition to a protein sample, precipitant, and a chemical from a chemical library, preparation **119** may also include a chemical additive or other precisely targeted substance ("magic bullet") which may improve diffraction, a cryo protectant, or may include a heavy atom additive.

Among other possible benefits, a system in accordance with the present disclosure may provide for in situ data collecting. Inserts may be removed from a flex plate and the inserts may be placed within standard mounts for a goniometer. The goniometer may thus perform x-ray analysis of crystals formed within the insert while crystals are still within the insert. A user may not have to endure the laborious activity of gathering crystals in order to analyze the crystals with a goniometer. A user may not have to purchase and operate complicated and unreliable robotics to analyze crystals formed in flex plates that may not have removable inserts. A system in accordance with the present disclosure may provide high throughput by eliminating sample collection steps. The inserts may be directly, placed into a goniometer as the inserts may be compatible with the centimeter sized throw of x-ray beams. Small amounts of preparations and precipitants may be used as the inserts may be used with nanoliter volumes. Waste may be reduced as the base plates may be reused.

While various aspects and embodiments have been disclosed herein, other aspects and embodiments will be apparent to those skilled in the art. The various aspects and embodiments disclosed herein are for purposes of illustration and are not intended to be limiting, with the true scope and spirit being indicated by the following claims.

The invention claimed is:

1. A method to make a sample, the method comprising: placing a preparation within a crystallization region of at least one removable insert having a plurality of securement tabs, the at least one removable insert secured to a securement area of a base plate using the plurality of securement tabs; placing a precipitant within a reservoir region of the at least one removable insert, the reservoir region being separated from the crystallization region by walls defining channels; removing the insert from the base plate; and placing the at least one removable insert into a testing device to test the sample in situ.
2. The method of claim 1, further comprising placing the insert into a goniometer.
3. The method of claim 1, further comprising, prior to placing the preparation within the crystallization region of the insert, securing a cover to the insert.
4. The method of claim 3, wherein the placing is performed by acoustic droplet ejection.
5. The method of claim 3, further comprising: prior to removing the insert from the base plate, removing the cover; covering the base plate with an x-ray transparent cover; and cutting the x-ray transparent cover around the insert.
6. The method of claim 1, wherein the sample is a first sample, the preparation is a first preparation, the precipitant is a first precipitant, the reservoir region is a first reservoir region, the crystallization region is a first crystallization region and the channels are first channels, the method further comprising: placing a second precipitant within a second reservoir region of the insert, the second reservoir region being separated from a second crystallization region by walls defining second channels; allowing vapor from the second precipitant to achieve equilibrium between the second reservoir region and the second crystallization region; removing the insert from the base plate; and placing the insert into a testing device to test the first sample and a second sample.

7. The method of claim 1, further comprising: allowing vapor from the precipitant to achieve equilibrium between the reservoir region and the crystallization region.
8. The method of claim 1, wherein the crystallization region has more than one preparations.
9. The method of claim 1, wherein the placing is performed using at least one of the plurality of securement tabs.
10. A method to make a sample, the method comprising: obtaining a flex plate having a base plate, wherein the base plate includes at least one securement area and at least one removable insert in the at least one securement area, wherein the removable insert includes a reservoir region and a crystallization region separated by a wall including channels, the removable insert further includes at least one securement tab configured to secure the removable insert to the base plate at the securement area; placing a preparation within the crystallization region of the at least one removable insert; placing a precipitant within a reservoir region of the at least one removable insert, the reservoir region being separated from the crystallization region by walls defining channels; removing the insert from the base plate; and placing the at least one removable insert into a testing device to test the sample in situ.
11. The method of claim 10, wherein the crystallization region has more than one preparations.
12. The method of claim 10, wherein the reservoir region and the crystallization region include a backing.
13. The method of claim 12, wherein the sample is a first sample, the preparation is a first preparation, the precipitant is a first precipitant, the reservoir region is a first reservoir region, the crystallization region is a first crystallization region and the channels are first channels, the method further comprising: placing a second precipitant within a second reservoir region of the insert, the second reservoir region being separated from a second crystallization region by walls defining second channels; allowing vapor from the second precipitant to achieve equilibrium between the second reservoir region and the second crystallization region; removing the insert from the base plate; and placing the insert into a testing device to test the first sample and a second sample.
14. The method of claim 10 wherein the placing is performed using the at least one securement tab.

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