

# Alkynyl-protected Cu<sub>67</sub> nanocluster superatom: Structure anatomy and electrochemical CO<sub>2</sub> reducion study

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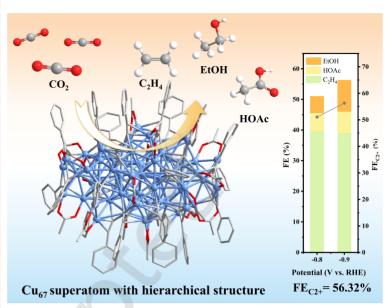
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## Alkynyl-protected $Cu_{67}$ nanocluster superatom: Structure anatomy and electrochemical $CO_2$ reduction study

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We report a novel  $Cu_{67}$  superatom with a hierarchical  $Cu_5@Cu_{26}@Cu_{36}$  core, and the Cu core exhibits intrisinc chiral nature but  $Cu_{67}$  is a racemate.  $Cu_{67}$  displays high selectivity toward  $C_{2+}$  products in eCO<sub>2</sub>RR, and *in-situ* ATR-SEIRAS discloses the reaction pathway while DFT calculations comprehensively elucidate the reaction mechanism.

<sup>†</sup> These authors contributed equally to this work.



## Alkynyl-protected Cu<sub>67</sub> nanocluster superatom: Structure anatomy and electrochemical CO<sub>2</sub> reducion study

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Atomically precise high-nuclearity Cu nanoclusters (Cu atom number > 50) with both Cu(I) and Cu(0) species have been rarely reported due to the inherent instability of Cu(0) species. Herein, we report a  $C_3$  symmetric alkynyl-protected [ $Cu_{67}(C \equiv CPh)_{24}(OAc)_{18}$ ] ( $Cu_{67}$ ) superatomic nanocluster, which possesses a hierarchical metal core structure of  $Cu_5@Cu_2_6@Cu_3_6$ .  $Cu_{67}$  is synthesized by a one-pot reduction strategy in which phenylacetylene drive the assembly of a nested architecture stabilized by synergistic  $\mu$ -coordinated alkynyl ligands ( $\mu$ 4/ $\mu$ 5 modes) and  $\kappa$ 2-bridged acetates. Remarkably, when  $Cu_{67}$  is used for electrochemical  $CO_2$  reduction reaction (e $CO_2RR$ ), deep reduced hydrocarbon chemicals especially the  $C_{2+}$  products with high selectivity are acquired. Specifically,  $Cu_{67}$  achieves a Faradaic efficiency (FE) of 56.32% for the total  $C_{2+}$  products at -0.9 V vs. RHE, among which the FE of ethylene (FE $_{C2H4}$ ) is 39.01%. The excellent catalytic performance from  $Cu_{67}$  is superior than most of the recently reported Cu-nanocluster-based catalysts. *In-situ* attenuated total reflection surface-enhanced infrared absorption spectroscopy (ATR-SEIRAS) study reveals the reaction pathway and identifies the key intermediate \*COCHO for yielding  $C_{2+}$  products. Density functional theory (DFT) calculations systematically elucidate the reaction mechanism of e $CO_2RR$  on  $Cu_{67}$  to generate CO and  $C_2H_4$ , where the transformation from \*CO to \*CHO is the rate-determining step for generating the  $C_{2+}$  products. This work not only enriches the family member of alkynyl-protected high-nuclearity superatomic Cu nanoclusters, but also provides atomical-level mechanistic insights on employing Cu nanoclusters for e $CO_2RR$  to produce highly valuable products.

#### **KEYWORDS**

Cu<sub>67</sub> nanoclusters, hierarchical structure, electrochemical CO<sub>2</sub> reduction, in-situ spectroscopic study, density functional theory calculations

#### 1 Introduction

Electrochemical CO<sub>2</sub> reduction reaction (eCO<sub>2</sub>RR) driven by renewable electricity provides an attractive route to close the anthropogenic carbon cycle and acquire valuable carbon-based fuels and feedstocks [1-7]. Particularly, the generation of deep reduced chemicals with higher energy densities such as multi-carbon oxygenate and hydrocarbon products (e. g. C<sub>2+</sub> molecules, including C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>6</sub>, C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>5</sub>OH, C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>4</sub>, CH<sub>3</sub>CHO, CH<sub>3</sub>CO<sub>2</sub>H, etc.) is highly desired [8-11]. However, the deep reduction and selective conversion of CO<sub>2</sub> into C<sub>2+</sub> products is highly dependent on the complex reaction conditions especially the catalyst composition and structure. Cu-based nanomaterials have been widely regarded as one of the most effective and promising catalysts that can convert CO<sub>2</sub> into C<sub>2+</sub> products, thanks to the approriate binding energy to the key intermediates and the strong capability to construct the C-C bonds [12–16]. It is worth noting that, the size, geomertric configuration, local Cu coordination environment, and even the chemical valence state of Cu species

can significantly affect the selectivity of  $C_{2+}$  products, as  $C_1$  products (e. g. CO, CH<sub>3</sub>OH, HCOOH, CH<sub>4</sub>) and H<sub>2</sub> are more thermodynamically favorable to be generated simultaneously [17,18]. Therefore, fabricating Cu nanocatalysts with uniform size, precise structure, and homogeneous chemical coordination environment is highly desired for advancing the mechansitic understanding on the structure-activity-selectivty relationship [19–26].

The emergence of molecular Cu nanocluster (Cu NC) with precise structure can potentially resolve the above issue, as these atomically precise Cu nanoclusters possess uniform ultrasmall size (less than 3 nm in diameter) and crystallographically resolved structure [27–31]. In fact, a great deal of research efforts has been dedicated to exploring atomically precise Cu nanoclusters as model and effective catalysts toward eCO<sub>2</sub>RR in the past decade. For instance, the Zang and Wang group prepared three Cu clusters of Cu<sub>8</sub>(H)(L<sub>1</sub>)<sub>6</sub>PF<sub>6</sub>, Cu<sub>8</sub>(<sup>t</sup>BuS)<sub>4</sub>(L<sub>1</sub>)<sub>4</sub>, and Cu<sub>8</sub>(<sup>t</sup>BuS)<sub>4</sub>(L<sub>2</sub>)<sub>4</sub> with different metal core configurations, and the ditetrahedron-shaped

Cu<sub>8</sub> cluster showed ~2 times Faradaic efficiency (FE) for CO2-to-HCOOH than the cube-shaped Cu8 cluster, mainly due to the lower energy barrier to form the key intermediate of HCOO\* [32]. In another study, Wu et al. discovered that, the Cu<sub>6</sub>(MBD)<sub>6</sub> (MBD = 2-mercaptobenzimidazole) cluster with symmetry-broken CuS<sub>2</sub>N<sub>1</sub> active sites exhibited a much higher FE toward hydrocarbon products in eCO<sub>2</sub>RR than the Cu<sub>6</sub> cluster with symmetric CuS<sub>3</sub> sites. Such performance enhancement is attributed to the asymmetric coordinated CuS<sub>2</sub>N<sub>1</sub> sites rearrange the Cu 3d orbitals with d<sub>x2-v2</sub> as the highest occupied d-orbital, which favors the generation of the key intermediate \*COOH for \*CO formation [33]. Meanwhile, using Cu<sub>4</sub>(MMI)<sub>4</sub> and Cu<sub>8</sub>(MMI)<sub>4</sub>(<sup>t</sup>BuS)<sub>4</sub> (MMI = 2-mercapto-1-methylimidazole) as model catalytic molecules, Li et al. found the Cu-S dual sites in thiolate-protected Cu nanoclusters play a critical role in accelerating the process of eCO<sub>2</sub>RR and water dissociation [34]. Recently, Liu and co-workers invented a co-coupling approach that can realize the hierarchical assembly of Cu(I) nanoclusters, where the Cu<sub>38</sub> cluster demonstrated outstanding activity in converting CO2 into hydrocarbon products in eCO<sub>2</sub>RR [35]. Note that, Cu nanoclusters can be mainly divided into two types, Cu(I) cluster without valence electrons, and Cu superatomic cluster with valence electrons containing both the Cu(I) and Cu(0) species [36,37]. One may notice that, despite the great progress of employing atomically precise Cu nanoclusters to acquire deep reduced products in eCO<sub>2</sub>RR, most of the reported cases are Cu(I) clusters with nuclearity less than 50. Rare case can be found on employing superatomic Cu nanoclusters with more than 50 Cu atoms for eCO<sub>2</sub>RR. On one hand, previous studies on Cu nanocatalysts have revealed that, the Cu(0) species can be crucial for enhancing the selectivity of the C<sub>2+</sub> products [38,39]. On the other hand, relatively larger Cu nanoclusters with over 50 Cu atoms in the core can provide more favorable adjacent sites and surface curvature for the key C-C coupling step for yielding the C<sub>2+</sub> products [40–42]. Therefore, exploring Cu superatomic nanoclusters with high nulcearity as model catalysts for eCO<sub>2</sub>RR is of significant fundamental interests hence being highly desirable.

Meanwhile, despite several cases of high-nuclearity Cu nanoclusters (Cu atom number > 50) have been documented, most of them are rather Cu(I) clusters but not Cu superatoms. For instance, Sagadevan et al. fabricated a [Cu<sub>61</sub>(S<sup>t</sup>Bu)<sub>26</sub>S<sub>6</sub>Cl<sub>6</sub>H<sub>14</sub>] cluster (Cu<sub>61</sub>), which enabled the C-N bond-forming reactions of aryl chlorides under visible-light irradiation [43]. Yan et al. synthesized Cu<sub>62</sub>(4-F-PhS)<sub>30</sub>(CF<sub>3</sub>COO)<sub>8</sub>(PPh<sub>3</sub>)<sub>6</sub>H<sub>10</sub> near-infrared photothermal conversion. Under 808 nm laser irradiation, the cluster solution elevated from room temperature to approximately 90°C within 10 mins, achieving a photothermal conversion efficiency of 55.98% [44]. Following that, the same team reported the synthesis of a [Cu<sub>58</sub>H<sub>20</sub>PET<sub>36</sub>(PPh<sub>3</sub>)<sub>4</sub>]<sup>2+</sup> nanocluster which can be transformed  $(Cu_{58}),$ surface-defective [Cu<sub>57</sub>H<sub>20</sub>PET<sub>36</sub>(PPh<sub>3</sub>)<sub>4</sub>]<sup>+</sup> cluster (Cu<sub>57</sub>), and the latter one showed promising activity for click chemistry especially the photoinduced [3+2] azide-alkyne cycloaddition [45]. In another study, the Zang group deeply analyzed the metal packing mode and molecular assembly of  $[Cl@Cu_{70}H_{22}(PhC\equiv C)_{29}(CF_3COO)_{16}]^{2+}$ Sun et al. recorded [46]. In 2024,  $[Cu_{66}Cl_8(PPh_3)_8(SC_2H_5)_{32}H_{24}]^{2+}$  cluster  $(Cu_{66})$  with hierarchical square motifs, and such Cu<sub>66</sub> cluster exhibited high catalytic and moderate stability in the chemoselective hydrogenation of cyclohexanone [47]. Recently, the Sun and Wang

group prepared two robust Cu(I)-alkyne nanoclusters of  $[(C_2)_8@Cu_{50}]$  (Cu<sub>50</sub>) and  $[(C_2)_{10}@Cu_{56}]$  (Cu<sub>56</sub>), and Cu<sub>50</sub> displays strong yellow phosphorescence and prominent X-ray-excited luminescence [48]. In the above cases, only Cu<sub>61</sub> is superatomic nanocluster, while Cu<sub>58</sub>, Cu<sub>57</sub>, Cu<sub>70</sub>, Cu<sub>66</sub>, Cu<sub>50</sub>, and Cu<sub>56</sub> are all Cu(I) clusters. Herein, we report an alkynyl-protected high-nuclearity Cu NC superatom of [Cu<sub>67</sub>(C≡CPh)<sub>24</sub>(OAc)<sub>18</sub>] (abbreviated as Cu<sub>67</sub>) with C<sub>3</sub> symmetry, which exhibits excellent C<sub>2+</sub> product selectivity in eCO<sub>2</sub>RR. Single crystal X-ray diffraction (SC-XRD) analysis reveals that, Cu<sub>67</sub> adopts a distinctive hierarchical assembled structure comprising an inner Cu<sub>5</sub> hexahedral kernel, a middle layer of eight Cu<sub>3</sub> triangular units with 2 Cu atoms on the C<sub>3</sub> axis, and an outermost layer of twelve Cu<sub>3</sub> units forming a Cu<sub>5</sub>@Cu<sub>26</sub>@Cu<sub>36</sub> core. In the eCO<sub>2</sub>RR test, Cu<sub>67</sub> can achieve a total hydrocarbon FE of 64.03% at -0.9 V vs. RHE, of which 56.32% is contributed by the C<sub>2+</sub> products (C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>4</sub>: 39.01%: CH<sub>3</sub>COOH: 7.02%; C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>5</sub>OH: 10.29%). In-situ attenuated total reflection surface-enhanced infrared absorption spectroscopy (ATR-SEIRAS) study identifies the key intermediates and unravels the reaction pathway for generating the C<sub>2+</sub> products. Further DFT calculations systematically elucidate the reaction mechanism, and confirms the transformation from \*CO to \*CHO is the rate determining step for yielding the  $C_{2+}$  products.

#### 2 Experimental section

See experimental details in Electronic Supplementary Materials.

#### 3 Results and discussion

#### 3.1 Synthesis and structure anatomy of Cu<sub>67</sub> nanocluster

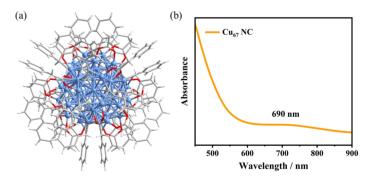


Figure 1 (a) The overall structure of Cu<sub>67</sub>. (b) Absorbance spectrum of Cu<sub>67</sub>.

The typical synthesis of  $Cu_{67}$  NCs involves the formation of a copper-alkynyl complex followed by a one-pot reduction process, as illustrated in Scheme S1. Initially, copper(I) acetate (Cu(OAc)) and phenylacetylene were mixed together and kept stirring in dichloromethane (DCM) to form the  $[Cu(C \equiv CPh)]_n$  precursor. Subsequently, diphenylsilane dissolved in DCM was dropwise added under vigorous stirring, and the reaction was allowed to proceed for 9 h, yielding a dark brown crude product. After centrifugation, the solid residue was discarded, and the supernatant was collected. Rotary evaporation was then employed to remove all the solvent, and the resulting solid was acquired after washing by n-hexane serveral times. The final product was dissolved in toluene, and black hexagonal block crystals were obtained through hexane diffusion into the toluene solution over 7 days (Figure S1).

The CCDC number for the  $[Cu_{67}(C\equiv CPh)_{24}(OAc)_{18}]$ - crystal is 2417379.

Single-crystal X-ray diffraction analysis (SC-XRD) was employed to determine the precise molecular structure of Cu<sub>67</sub> NC (Figure S2). The detailed crystallographic parameters are summarized in Table S1. The results reveal that, each unit cell contains two cluster molecules (Figure S3), and the molecular formula of the cluster is identified as [Cu<sub>67</sub>(C≡CPh)<sub>24</sub>(OAc)<sub>18</sub>] with a trigonal space group of P-31c. The overall structure of Cu<sub>67</sub> NC shows that, it comprises 67 Cu atoms, 24 phenylacetylene ligands, and 18 acetate ligands (Figure 1a and Figure S4). The UV-vis absorbance spectrum of Cu<sub>67</sub> in DCM exhibits a broad absorption peak at 690 nm (Figure 1b), an indicative of the characteristic feature. Such absorbance feature is distinctly different from most of the reported high-nuclearity Cu nanoclusters especially the Cu(I) clusters, and it probably originates from the unique hierarchical Cu core structure of Cu<sub>67</sub> (Table S2). In the absorbance spectra showed decomposition of Cu<sub>67</sub> was observed after one week, indicating the good integrity and stability of the Cu<sub>67</sub> structure (Figure S5).

To validate the presence of hydride in Cu<sub>67</sub>, <sup>1</sup>H NMR test was conducted and the results are shown in Figure S6. The single peak

with chemical shift value at 1.52 ppm can be attributed to water molecule (from the solvent), while the peaks with chemical shift values at 1.27 and 0.87 ppm correspond to hexane. There is a single peak with chemical shift at ~2.00 ppm, which is attributed from the -CH<sub>3</sub> group in the OAc ligand. Meanwhile, the peaks with chemical shift values at ~7.39, ~7.13, ~6.94 ppm are from the protons in the o-, m-, -p position of the phenyl groups in the alkynyl ligand. As the integrated area of the NMR peak indicates the stoichiometric ratio, the ratio of 48: 24: 48: 54 agrees well with the cluster formula of [Cu<sub>67</sub>(C≡CPh)<sub>24</sub>(OAc)<sub>18</sub>]. It indicates no hydride is present in the Cu<sub>67</sub> cluster. No counterions were detected in the crystal lattice. To determine the oxidation state of Cu<sub>67</sub>, ESI-MS measurements were performed, including both positive and negative modes. Molecular ion peaks were observed in both modes, but the peaks in the negative mode were more fragmented. In the positive ion mode, peaks closely resembling the target compound were observed, separated by m/z = 0.5 and bearing a surface charge of +2. Figure S7 shows the peak with m/z at 3907.1305 Da was assigned to  $[Cu_{67}(C \equiv CPh)_{24}(OAc)_{17}+2Cu]^{2+}$ (cal. 3907.1386 Da). Additionally, a peak with m/z at 3969.0979 Da could be fitted to [Cu<sub>67</sub>(C≡CPh)<sub>24</sub>(OAc)<sub>18</sub>+3Cu]<sup>2+</sup> (Figure S8). It clarifies the oxidation state of the Cu<sub>67</sub> NC and further confirms the absence of hydrides in the cluster.

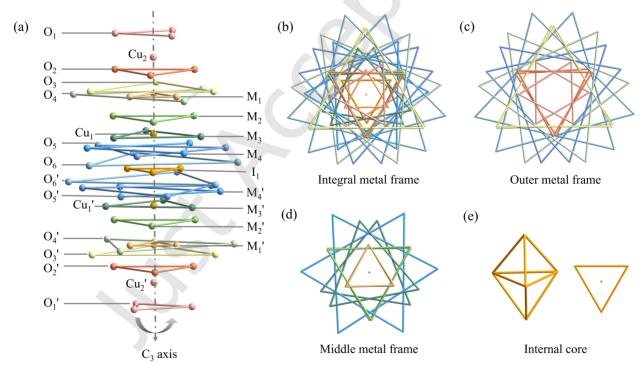


Figure 2 Structure anatomy of the  $Cu_{67}$  core. (a) Layer-by-layer display of 67 Cu atoms. (b) Integral metal frame of  $Cu_{67}$ . (c) Outer metal frame of  $Cu_{67}$ . (d) Middle metal frame of  $Cu_{67}$ . (e) Internal core of  $Cu_{67}$ .

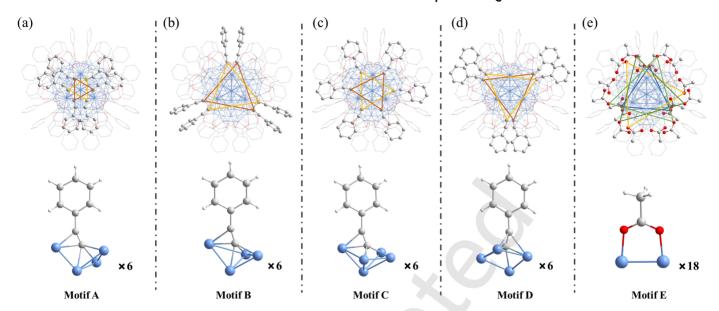


Figure 3 Anatomy of the ligand distribution of  $Cu_{67}$ . Resolution of the coordination of (a) motif A, (b) motif B, (c) motif C, (d) motif D, and (e) motif E, as well as the distribution on  $Cu_{67}$  in top view along the  $C_3$  axis. Color labels: Cu: blue; O: red; C: gray; H: white.

X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) was then utilized to probe the chemical states of the Cu<sub>67</sub> NC. The survey-scan spectra validated the presence of the Cu, C, O elements (Figure S9a). Meanwhile, the core-level XPS spectra of Cu 2p show two pronounced peaks with binding energies at 932.6 and 952.4 eV. which can be attributed to Cu 2p<sub>3/2</sub> and Cu 2p<sub>1/2</sub>, respectively (Figure S9b). As the binding energy of Cu 2p<sub>3/2</sub> is in the between of Cu(I) (~933.1 eV) and Cu(0) (~931.3 eV), it can be speculated the Cu elements in Cu<sub>67</sub> NC comprise both the Cu(I) and Cu(0) species [49,50]. Meanwhile, the Cu Auger electron spectrum (Figure S9c) shows a shoulder band at 918.5 eV associated with the Cu(0) species, supporting the partial zero valence state of Cu in Cu<sub>67</sub>, while a main peak at 916.0 eV corresponds to the Cu(I) component. Furthermore, the Cu K-edge X-ray absorption near-edge structure (XANES) spectra in Figure S10 shows consistent results with the Cu Auger spectrum regarding the valence state of Cu. The edge position of Cu<sub>67</sub> lies between that of Cu<sub>2</sub>O (8982.98 eV) and Cu box (8981.07 eV), indicating that the average oxidation state in Cu<sub>67</sub> is between +1 and 0.[51] In summary, Cu<sub>67</sub> is a superatomic cluster containing valence electrons, rather than a Cu(I) cluster or complex.

Next, the crystal structure of Cu<sub>67</sub> is carefully examined. Cu<sub>67</sub> exhibits a high degree of C<sub>3</sub> symmetry, with an assembly pattern that can be visualized as a stacking of multiple Cu<sub>3</sub> triangles, as depicted in Figure 2a. Additionally, four Cu atoms are positioned along the C<sub>3</sub> axis. The Cu-Cu bond lengths in Cu<sub>67</sub> range from 2.253(4) Å to 3.092(3) Å, with an average value of 2.643 Å, comparable to the distance in bulk Cu (2.556 Å). A detailed structural analysis reveals a core-shell architecture of the Cu<sub>67</sub> core, denoted as Cu<sub>5</sub>@Cu<sub>26</sub>@Cu<sub>36</sub> (Figures 2b-e). The innermost layer consists of a Cu<sub>3</sub> triangle (I<sub>1</sub>) and two Cu atoms (Cu<sub>1</sub> and Cu<sub>1</sub>', forming a hexahedral Cu<sub>5</sub> kernel. This innermost Cu kernel is ligand-free, with an average Cu-Cu bond length of 2.734 Å. The middle layer comprises eight Cu<sub>3</sub> triangles (M<sub>1</sub>, M<sub>1</sub>', M<sub>2</sub>, M<sub>2</sub>', M<sub>3</sub>, M<sub>3</sub>', M<sub>4</sub>, M<sub>4</sub>') and two Cu atoms (Cu<sub>2</sub> and Cu<sub>2</sub>') located on the C<sub>3</sub> axis. The side length of M<sub>1</sub>(M<sub>1</sub>'), M<sub>2</sub>(M<sub>2</sub>'), M<sub>3</sub>(M<sub>3</sub>'), M<sub>4</sub>(M<sub>4</sub>')

triangles is 2.600 Å, 4.496 Å, 4.894 Å, and 6.415 Å (Not bond length), respectively. The outermost layer is composed of twelve stacked  $Cu_3$  triangles  $(O_1, O_1', O_2, O_2', O_3, O_3', O_4, O_4', O_5, O_5', O_6, O_6')$ , with side length of 3.656 Å, 4.430 Å, 6.867 Å, 7.759 Å, 7.274 Å, and 8.473 Å (Not bond length), respectively. The outer Cu atoms are interconnected to form a cocoon-like structure (Figure S11), which has less lateral curvature. Such structural feature may favor the coupling of C-C bonds in  $eCO_2RR$ , thus promoting the generation of  $C_{2+}$  products.

The metal core configuration of Cu<sub>67</sub> is then anatomized profoundly in another aspect. As illustrated in Figure S12, the middle layer of Cu<sub>26</sub> can be divided as two Cu<sub>13</sub> moieties, which symmetrically bonds to the two sites of the Cu<sub>5</sub> kernel, forming a Cu<sub>5</sub>@Cu<sub>26</sub> centrosymmetric core. The outermost Cu<sub>36</sub> can be viewed as two pinwheel-shaped Cu<sub>12</sub> moieties which separately dock onto the Cu<sub>13</sub> moiety, plus six Cu<sub>2</sub> units that are capped on the middle waist. Interestingly, the six groups of Cu<sub>2</sub> units display two different configurations, where the Cu<sub>2</sub>-α unit (connected to motif B, will be discussed in next paragraph) has a torsion angle of ~37° with respect to the C<sub>3</sub> axis, and the Cu<sub>2</sub>-β unit (connected to motif D, will be discussed in the next paragraph) has a torsion angle of ~64° (Figure S13). However, as both clockwise and anti-clockwise crossed arrangments are equally present, the Cu<sub>67</sub> crystal has the equal amount of two entiomers, hence the Cu<sub>67</sub> cluster is a racemate (Figure S14). Similar phenonmena have also been observed in other coinage metal nanoclusters [52–54].

Subsequently, the spatial configuration and the ligand-metal binding motifs in  $Cu_{67}$  are analyzed. The surface ligands of  $Cu_{67}$  NC also exhibit a  $C_3$  symmetric distribution. As illustrated in Figures 3a-d, the phenylacetylene ligand presents four distinct coordination modes with the Cu atoms. Specifically, Motif A and Motif B are coordinated by a mode of  $\mu_4$ :  $\eta^1$ ,  $\eta^1$ ,  $\eta^1$ ,  $\eta^2$ ; Motif C by  $\mu_5$ :  $\eta^1$ ,  $\eta^1$ ,  $\eta^1$ ,  $\eta^1$ ,  $\eta^2$ ; and Motif D by  $\mu_4$ :  $\eta^1$ ,  $\eta^1$ ,  $\eta^2$ ,  $\eta^2$ . Motif A and Motif B differ only slightly, with an additional Cu-Cu bond bearing a length of 3.092(3) Å in Motif B; while the corresponding two Cu atoms in Motif A are not bonded due to a large distance of 3.656 Å

between them (Figure S15). Each of the four motifs contains six ligands, each forming two  $L_3$  triangles (L = phenylacetylene) bound to the metal core. The positions of the side-view distributions can be found in Figure S16. The 18 acetate ligands bind to the Cu core in a  $\kappa^2$  coordination mode, which can probably enhance the overall stability of the nanoclusters (Figure 3E). It can be noted that, the alkynyl ligand significantly enriches the coordination modes on the Cu<sub>67</sub> core surface, where some of these Cu-alkynyl binding motifs have been recorded in previous studies [55–57]. These unique structural features of Cu<sub>67</sub>, including its

multilayered core-shell structure and specific metal-ligand coordination mode, can play a crucial role in determining its physical and chemical properties, paving the way for further exploration of its potential applications.

Moreover, the thorough comparison of atomically precise high-nuclearity Cu nanoclusters (Cu atoms > 50) including the Cu valence, core configuration, symmetry, and main ligand coordination mode are summarized in Table S2. It can be noted that, Cu $_{67}$  is a rare superatom with unique structural feature.

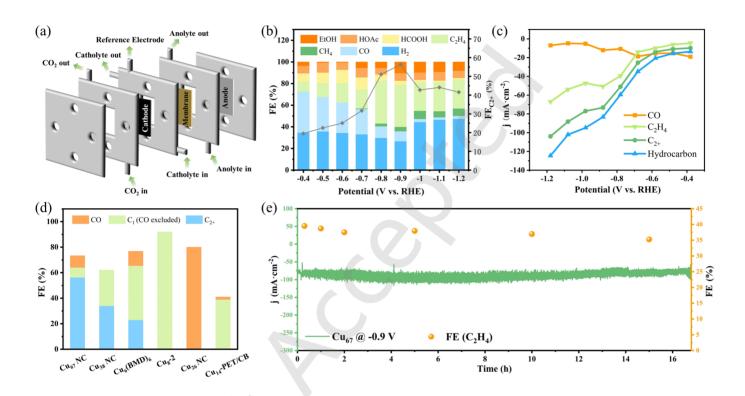


Figure 4 (a) Schematic illustration of eCO<sub>2</sub>RR in a gas-fed flow cell. (b) FE values of eCO<sub>2</sub>RR products on  $Cu_{67}$  at different potentials. (c) Partial current densities of CO,  $C_2H_4$ ,  $C_{2+}$  and hydrocarbons on  $Cu_{67}$ . (d) Comparison of eCO<sub>2</sub>RR performance of  $Cu_{67}$  with reported  $Cu_{67}$  in Potentials. (e) Partial current densities of  $Cu_{67}$  at -0.9 V vs. RHE for 17 h

#### 3.2 eCO<sub>2</sub>RR performance of Cu<sub>67</sub> NC

The catalytic performance of Cu<sub>67</sub> toward eCO<sub>2</sub>RR was then evaluated using a three-compartment flow cell containing a Pt foil as the counter electrode, an Ag/AgCl electrode as the reference electrode, and a nanocluster catalyst-modified carbon paper as the working electrode in 1 M KOH electrolyte (Figure 4a). The linear scanning voltammetry (LSV) curves (Figure S17) reveals that, in a CO<sub>2</sub>-saturated electrolyte, the onset overpotential is lower and the measured current density is significantly higher than that in N<sub>2</sub>-saturated electrolyte in the presence of Cu<sub>67</sub> NC. It indicates that, Cu<sub>67</sub> NC is catalytic effective for eCO<sub>2</sub>RR. The gas-phase and liquid-phase products of eCO<sub>2</sub>RR are further analyzed by gas chromatography and <sup>1</sup>H NMR spectroscopy, and the detected products include H<sub>2</sub>, CO, CH<sub>4</sub>, C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>4</sub>, HCOOH, CH<sub>3</sub>COOH, and C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>5</sub>OH. Figure 4b shows the distribution of the products in the potential range of -0.4 V to -1.2 V (vs. RHE). At -0.4 V, CO is the main product with a FE of 38.06%. As the applied potential goes more negatively, the FE<sub>CO</sub> gradually decreases to 2.77% at -1.2 V, and the FE of other hydrocarbon products gradually increases, with ethylene being the dominant product. It reaches the maximum

FE<sub>C2H4</sub> value of 39.52% at -0.8 V vs. RHE. The FE<sub>C2+</sub> reaches the highest value of 56.32% at -0.9 V vs. RHE ( $C_2H_4$ : 39.01%; CH<sub>3</sub>COOH: 7.02%;  $C_2H_5$ OH: 10.29%). At -0.9 V, the FE of the total hydrocarbons is 64.03%, indicating significantly higher selectivity for the  $C_{2+}$  products than for the  $C_1$  products (CO excluded).

The partial current density plots (Figure 4c) further corroborate the above conclusion, as the partial current densities of ethylene,  $C_{2+}$  products and hydrocarbons increases gradually with the increasing of the applied potential, whereas the partial current density of CO exhibits some fluctuation but decreases in an overall trend. Furthermore, such outstanding catalytic activity in eCO<sub>2</sub>RR especially the high FE of the  $C_{2+}$  products is superior than most of the recently reported Cu-nanocluster-based catalysts, as summarized in Figure 4d [32,33,35,58,59]. Surprisingly, to the best of our knowledge, no case of high-nuclearity Cu NC superatom to achieve such an excellent  $FE_{C2+}$  in eCO<sub>2</sub>RR has been reported so far. Furthermore, the long-term stability is another critical descriptor to evaluate the intrinsic catalytic property of an eCO<sub>2</sub>RR

catalyst. Notably, Cu<sub>67</sub> NC exhibits remarkable stability in continuous electrolysis testing over 17 h, with no decay in total current density and maintains stable FE<sub>C2H4</sub> being above 35% (Figure 4e), suggesting excellent stability for prolonged operation. Additionally, the XPS measurement of Cu<sub>67</sub> after the stability test was conducted. The complete XPS spectrum (Figure S18a) identified the presence of Cu, C, and O elements, confirming that

the core elemental composition of  $Cu_{67}$  remained unchanged. As demonstrated in Figure S18b, the binding energies of Cu2p (Cu  $2p_{3/2} = 932.8$  eV; Cu  $2p_{1/2} = 952.7$  eV) exhibited a negligible shift compared to the pre-reaction state, but remained strictly within the typical range of Cu(0) (~931.3 eV) and Cu(I) (~933.1 eV). It strongly validates the electronic stability of Cu<sub>67</sub>, further confirming its robust catalytic stability.

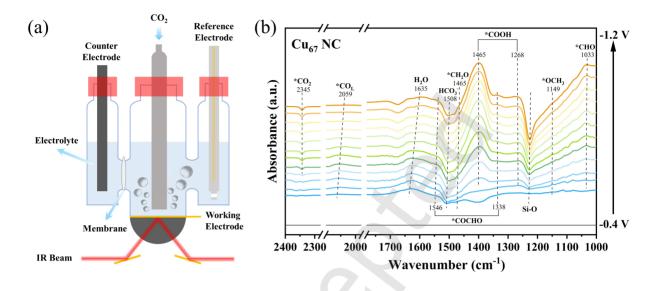


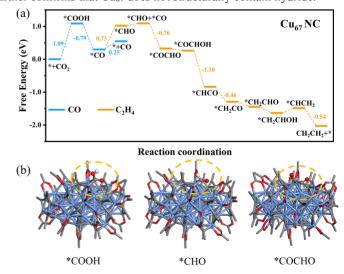
Figure 5 (a) Schematic of the in-situ ATR-SEIRAS device. (b) In-situ ATR-SEIRAS spectra of Cu<sub>67</sub> with the applied potential from -0.4 to -1.2 V vs. RHE.

#### 3.3 Mechanistic investigation of eCO<sub>2</sub>RR

To deeply comprehend the eCO<sub>2</sub>RR mechanism on Cu<sub>67</sub>, the adsorbed intermediates during the catalytic process are tracked using In-situ attenuated total reflection surface enhanced infrared absorption spectroscopy (ATR-SEIRAS). The test setup is shown schematically in Figure 5a, where the electrolyte is a KHCO<sub>3</sub> solution saturated with CO<sub>2</sub>. As shown in Figure 5b and Figure S19, significant \*CO<sub>2</sub> adsorption peaks are observed at 2345 cm<sup>-1</sup>, and the peak at 2059 cm<sup>-1</sup> corresponds to the CO linear adsorption (\*CO<sub>L</sub>) intermediate, which is a highly reactive intermediate in the eCO<sub>2</sub>RR process [60,61]. The \*CO<sub>L</sub> intermediate can either readily to be protonated to form \*CHO or undergoes a coupling reaction to form the key intermediate of \*COCHO for generating the C2+ products [62]. Meanwhile, the pronounced peaks at 1268 cm<sup>-1</sup> and 1465 cm<sup>-1</sup> are attributed to the \*COOH intermediate [63], suggesting that CO<sub>2</sub> reduction follows the reaction path of \*CO<sub>2</sub>→\*COOH→\*CO under high potential conditions. However, as the applied potential goes more negatively, the \*CO<sub>L</sub> peaks gradually disappear and the characteristic peaks of other intermediates such as \*CHO (1033 cm<sup>-1</sup>), \*OCH<sub>3</sub> (1149 cm<sup>-1</sup>), \*CH<sub>2</sub>O (1465 cm<sup>-1</sup>) and \*COCHO (1338 cm<sup>-1</sup> and 1546 cm<sup>-1</sup>) appear successively [34,64–66]. The peaks of \*OCH<sub>3</sub> and \*CH<sub>2</sub>O are less pronounced, which is in echo with the lower FE<sub>C1</sub> value (CO excluded) in eCO<sub>2</sub>RR. It indicates that, during the eCO<sub>2</sub>RR process, the \*CO species undergo further conversion into hydrocarbon-adsorbed species on the Cu<sub>67</sub> surface, ultimately generating deeply reduced products. Note that, the emergence of the \*COCHO peak signifies the initiation of generating the C<sub>2+</sub> products [67]. Moreover, a distinct, broad peak is observed at 1635 cm<sup>-1</sup>, corresponding to the OH-vibration band of the adsorbed H<sub>2</sub>O. The gradual weakening of this peak suggests that, the H<sub>2</sub>O molecule is being activated and subsequently consumed to provide protons for the proton-coupled electron transfer (PCET) process,

resulting in the formation of hydrocarbon-adsorbed species with \*CO [68]. The above ATR-SEIRAS results offer critical information for the key intermediate formation, which discloses the general pathway of eCO<sub>2</sub>RR to generate both C<sub>1</sub> and C<sub>2+</sub> products catalyzed by Cu<sub>67</sub>.

It is also worth noting that, in the overall *in-situ* ATR-SEIRAS spectrum, no Cu-H peak (2090 cm<sup>-1</sup>) was detected[22]. As such signal is either from the Cu-H bonds in the cluster or due to the cluster adsorbs hydrogen during the electrocatalytic process, it further confirms that Cu<sub>67</sub> does not structurally contain hydride.



**Figure 6** (a) Free-energy diagrams for  $C_2H_4$  and CO formation on  $Cu_{67}$  at zero applied potential. (b) Partial critical intermediate configurations. Color labels: Cu: blue; O: red; C: gray; H: white.

To understand the electrocatalytic mechanism over the Cu<sub>67</sub> NC. we performed DFT calculations to determine the optimal catalytic sites and compare the catalytic selectivity for CO<sub>2</sub> electroreduction to CO versus to C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>4</sub>. To save the computational cost, we replaced the C≡C-Ph group with C≡C-CH<sub>3</sub> group. The coordinates of the Cu<sub>67</sub> nanocluster can be found in Table S3. A critical step in enhancing the electrocatalytic activity of nanoclusters is the removal of surface ligands. For Cu<sub>67</sub>, we removed the alkynyl ligand in order to create the active Cu site (Figure S20). Analysis of the active catalytic sites revealed that, they are located in the low-curvature region at the cluster center. This specific structural feature shortens the distance between adjacent adsorbed intermediates (\*CHO and \*CO), providing a favorable environment for the C-C coupling reaction in eCO<sub>2</sub>RR. The DFT details can be found in Electronic Supplementary Material. The possible pathways for the formation of C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>4</sub> are shown in Figure S21. Figure 6a shows the most feasible pathways for reducing CO<sub>2</sub> to CO and C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>4</sub> on Cu<sub>67</sub>. The corresponding intermediate configurations to form CO and C2H4 are presented in Figure 6b and Figure S22. We focus on the rate-determining steps (RDS) for the generation of CO and C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>4</sub>. For the CO<sub>2</sub> to CO conversion, the transformation of \* to \*COOH is identified as the RDS, exhibiting a free energy barrier of 1.09 eV. For the CO<sub>2</sub> to C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>4</sub> conversion, The transformation of \*CO to \*CHO is identified as the RDS, exhibiting a relatively low free energy barrier of 0.73 eV. The formation of the critical intermediate \*COCHO has a negative Gibbs free energy of -0.76 eV. Subsequently. The hydrogenation of \*COCHO produces intermediates such as \*COCHOH and \*CHCO which all have negative Gibbs free energies.

In addition, a systematic study of the stability of key intermediates was conducted, with three representative configurations selected for analysis: \*COOH, \*CHO+CO, and \*COCHO. Most intermediates adsorb on copper sites in a bridging adsorption configuration, as shown in Figure S23a. This adsorption mode favors their stability. Further structural analysis indicates that the bonds formed between the adsorbed intermediates and Cu sites are relatively short (bond lengths ranging from 1.94–2.19 Å), providing a structural basis for the stable existence of the intermediates. Additionally, we performed Hirshfeld charge calculations (Figure S23b), and the results of the charge distribution calculations further confirm the transfer of electrons from the Cu active sites to the adsorbed intermediates, indicating strong interactions between the two. This electron transfer effect not only enhances the adsorption strength between the Cu sites and the intermediates but also confirms the stability of the intermediates in this system at the electronic level.

#### **4 Conclusions**

In summary, an atomically precise superatomic high-nuclearity Cu<sub>67</sub> NC is successfully synthesized, and Cu<sub>67</sub> possesses a hierarchical metal core structure of Cu<sub>5</sub>@Cu<sub>26</sub>@Cu<sub>36</sub>. Despite the Cu core is intrinsically chiral, the whole cluster is a racemate. When used as catalyst for eCO<sub>2</sub>RR, Cu<sub>67</sub> exhibits high selectivity toward C<sub>2+</sub> products, evidenced by a 39.52% FE<sub>C2H4</sub> at -0.8 V vs. RHE, and a 56.32% FE for the total C<sub>2+</sub> products at -0.9 V vs. RHE. *In-situ* ATR-SEIRAS analysis reveals the general reaction pathway, where the key intermediate \*COCHO for yielding the C<sub>2+</sub> products is identified. DFT calculations further elucidates the reaction mechanism, where the rate-determining step is unraveled. This

study not only highlights the great advantages of employing high-nuclearity Cu superatomic cluster as model and effective electrocatalysts, but also provides atomical-level mechanistic understanding for designing Cu nanocatalysts to achieve highly valuable products in eCO<sub>2</sub>RR and other electrochemical reactions.

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Electronic Supplementary Material: Supplementary material (Experimental details, auxiliary diagrams, X-ray single-crystal diffraction parameters, additional eCO $_2$ RR measurements, ATR-SEIRAS results, computational details, and additional computational results) is available in the online version of this article at https://doi.org/10.26599/NR.2025.94908144.

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### **Electronic Supplementary Material**

## Alkynyl-protected Cu<sub>67</sub> nanocluster superatom: Structure anatomy and electrochemical CO<sub>2</sub> reducion study

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#### **Experimental Section**

**Materials and chemicals:** Dichloromethane (DCM), n-hexane and toluene were purchased from Zhiyuan Chemical Reagents (Tianjin, China). Cuprous acetate (Cu(OAc)), phenylacetylene (HC $\equiv$ CPh), diphenylsilane (Ph $_2$ SiH $_2$ ), XC-72 was purchased from Energy Chemical (Shanghai, China). Deionized water with a resistivity of 18.3 M $\Omega$  cm $^{-1}$  was obtained using a Barnstead Nanopure water system. All chemicals were used as received without further treatment.

Physical measurements and instrumentation: The surface chemical compositions and valence states were examined by X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS, Phi X-tool instrument). UV-vis absorption spectra of the clusters were recorded by a Shimadzu 2600 spectrophotometer (Japan). *In-situ* attenuated total reflection surface enhanced infrared spectroscopy (ATR-SEIRAS) measurements were performed on a Nicolet 6700 FTIR spectrometer with silicon as the prismatic window. The single crystal data collection for [Cu<sub>67</sub>(C≡CPh)<sub>24</sub>(OAc)<sub>18</sub>] (Cu<sub>67</sub>) was performed on an Agilent Technologies Super Nova single-crystal diffractometer using Mo Kα ( $\lambda$  = 0.71073 Å). In the Olex 2 graphical interface, SHELXT was used to solve and refine the structure. All non-hydrogen atoms were first refined isotropically then anisotropically. All of the hydrogen atoms of the ligand are placed at computational positions with fixed isotropic thermal parameters and are included in the final stage of the calculation of the structure factors for the full matrix least squares refinement. H NMR spectrum was recorded on a Bruker Ascend 400 M Hz. XAFS measurements were performed at the BL14W1 beamline of the Shanghai Synchrotron Radiation Facility (SSRF) using a Si (311) crystal monochromator. Prior to beamline analysis, samples were pressed into thin sheets with a diameter of 1 cm and sealed with Kapton tape. EXAFS spectrum at the Cu K-edge were recorded in transmission mode

Synthesis of  $[Cu_{67}(C\equiv CPh)_{24}(OAc)_{18}]^-$  nanocluster: A pale green suspension of Cu(OAc) (111 mg, 0.9 mmol) in dichloromethane (DCM, 10 mL) was stirred vigorously at room temperature. Phenylacetylene (PhC $\equiv$ CH, 64  $\mu$ L, 0.6 mmol) was added via a micropipette, leading to the immediate precipitation of a bright yellow powder, indicative of the formation of  $[Cu(C\equiv CPh)]_n$ . A DCM solution (2 mL) of diphenylsilane (Ph $_2$ SiH $_2$ , 100  $\mu$ L, 0.54 mmol) was slowly added dropwise to this suspension. The reaction mixture was stirred for 9 h, during which the color transitioned to a dark brown. After centrifugation (8000 rpm, 1 min) to remove insoluble residues, the supernatant was concentrated by rotary evaporation and dried under vacuum. The crude product was washed with hexane and a minimal amount of ethyl acetate to remove unreacted ligands. The resulting solid was dissolved in toluene and subjected to vapor diffusion with hexane as the antisolvent at 4°C for 7 days, yielding hexagonal black crystals (Figure S1) suitable for single-crystal X-ray diffraction analysis (Yield:  $\sim$ 15.4%, based on Cu). The CCDC number of  $[Cu_{67}(C\equiv CPh)_{24}(OAc)_{18}]^-$  is 2417379.

**Electrochemical measurements:** All electrochemical measurements were performed in a three-compartment flow cell. The electrochemical reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> was carried out using a CHI 760 electrochemical workstation. The working electrode was carbon paper modified with Cu<sub>67</sub> NCs, the reference electrode was Ag/AgCl and the counter electrode was Pt foil. A CO<sub>2</sub>-saturated 1 M KOH solution was used as the electrolyte. During the electrochemical reduction tests, CO<sub>2</sub> gas was delivered at an average rate of 25 mL min<sup>-1</sup> under ambient conditions and placed directly into the gas sampling loop of a gas chromatography (GC 9560). The gas chromatography was equipped with a thermal conductivity detector (TCD) for the detection of H<sub>2</sub>, flame ionization detector (FID) for the detection of hydrocarbons, and methanation tower (Agilent) before FID for the detection of CO. Pure Ar was used as the carrier gas for all compartments of the GC. The liquid phase products were detected by <sup>1</sup>H NMR.

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Electrochemical in situ ATR-SEIRAS measurements: The in situ ATR-SEIRAS tests were carried out on a Nicolet 6700 FTIR spectrometer equipped with an MCT (mercury-cadmium-tellurium) detector. The working electrode was a columnar silicon block with a gold film deposited on its surface by chemical deposition. Carbon rods and Ag/AgCl were used as counter electrode and reference electrode, respectively. Prior to the test, 5 mg of carbon black XC-72 was dispersed in 1 mL of ethanol and 20  $\mu$ L of the dispersion was dropwise cast onto the gold film. Subsequently, 30  $\mu$ L of the DCM solution containing Cu<sub>67</sub> NCs and 20  $\mu$ L of the Nafion solution dissolved in ethanol were added sequentially. After complete evaporation of the solvent, it was used as a working electrode for electrochemical tests.

Computational details: The density functional theory (DFT) calculations on the electrocatalytic activity were performed using the CP2K package (version 2023.1)[1]. To expedite the calculation convergence, we simplified the C $\equiv$ C-Ph groups with C $\equiv$ C-CH<sub>3</sub> groups. The nanoclusters were placed within a cubic (25 Å × 25Å × 25 Å), and the electronic structure calculations are described by DFT with spin-polarized Perdew–Burke–Ernzerhof (PBE) functional mixed double- $\zeta$  Gaussian and plane-wave (GPW) basis set, with an energy cutoff of 400 Ry[2]. The core electrons were modeled by Goedecker-Teter-Hutter (GTH) for the pseudopotentials of Cu, O, C and H, respectively. In addition, dispersion corrections were applied using the DFT-D3 method to account for van der Waals interactions[3,4]. According to the computational hydrogen electrode (CHE) model[5], the alteration in Gibbs free energy for each CO<sub>2</sub> reduction reaction (CO<sub>2</sub> RR) elementary reaction can be calculated as follows:

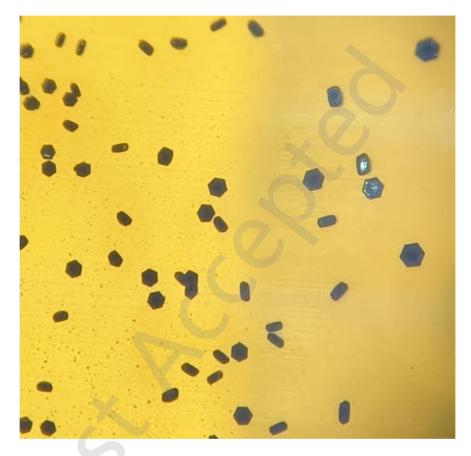
#### $\Delta G = \Delta E + \Delta Z P E - T \Delta S$

where  $\Delta E$ ,  $\Delta ZPE$  and  $\Delta S$  are the change of the total energy that can be directly obtained from DFT calculations, the difference of zero-point energy, and the change of entropy at 298.15 K, respectively. For the adsorbed intermediates, only vibrational entropy is considered, which is calculated from the DFT calculated vibrational frequencies. In addition, due to the inaccurate description of  $CO_2$  and CO molecules by PBE functional[2,6], we added correction of -0.34 eV for CO and +0.10 eV for  $CO_2[7]$ .

### **Supplementary Figures**

$$\begin{array}{c|c} Cu(OAc) & = & \\ + & \\ DCM & \\ \hline \end{array} \begin{array}{c} Ph_2SiH_2 \\ \hline Complex & \\ \hline \end{array} \begin{array}{c} Ph_2SiH_2 \\ \hline Reduction & \\ \hline \end{array} \begin{array}{c} [Cu_{67}(C \equiv CPh)_{24}(OAc)_{18}] \end{array}$$

**Scheme S1.** The synthetic route for Cu<sub>67</sub> nanoclusters.



**Figure S1**. Photographs of single crystal of Cu<sub>67</sub> clusters.

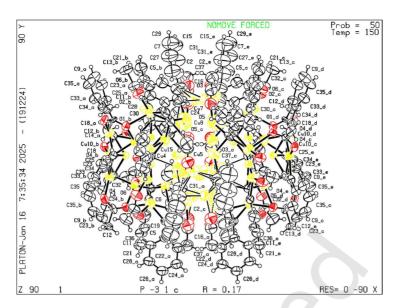


Figure S2. The thermal ellipsoids of the ORTEP diagram of Cu<sub>67</sub>.

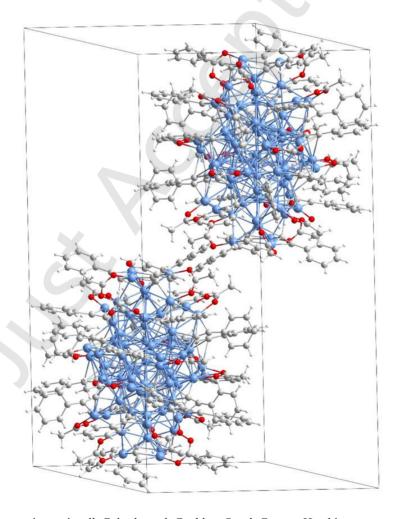


Figure S3. Packing of Cu<sub>67</sub> clusters in a unit cell. Color legend: Cu, blue; O red; C, grey; H, white.

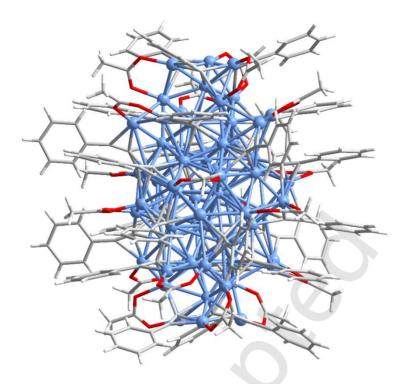
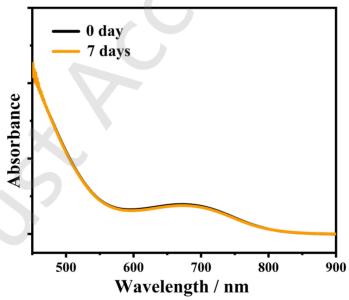
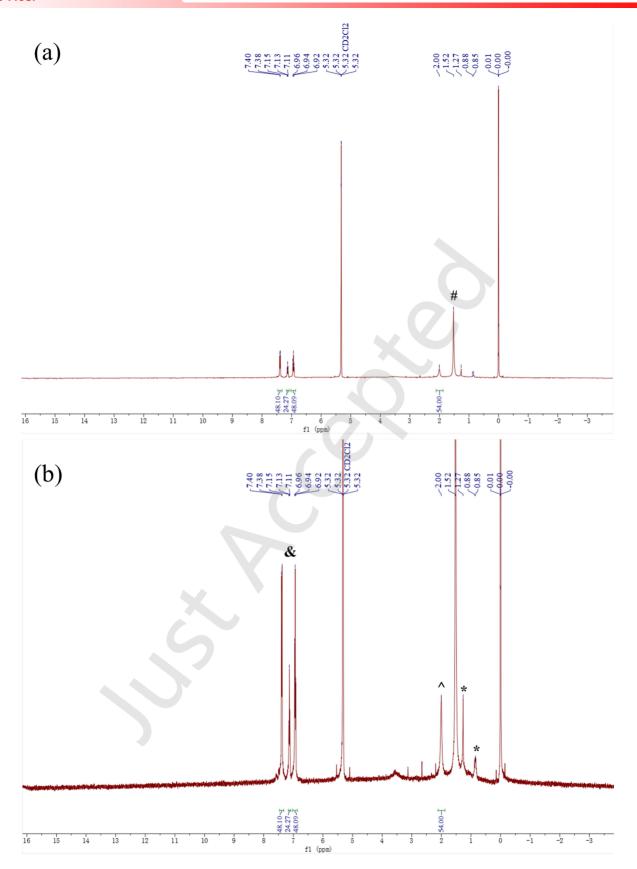


Figure S4. Side view of the overall structure of Cu<sub>67</sub>. Color legend: Cu, blue; O red; C, grey; H, white.



**Figure S5.** Comparison of Cu<sub>67</sub> absorbance before and after one week.



**Figure S6.** (a, b) <sup>1</sup>H NMR spectra of Cu<sub>67</sub> in CD<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>. The marked peak in (a) corresponds to water (#); the marked peaks in (b) correspond to phenylacetylene (&), OAc (^), and *n*-hexane (\*).

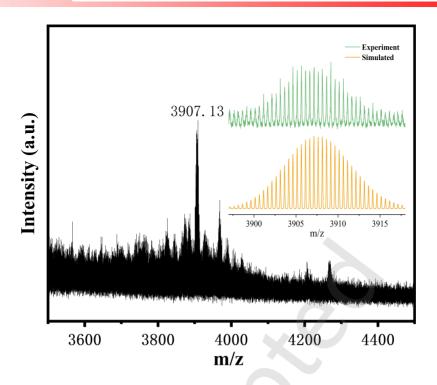


Figure S7. ESI-MS spectrum of  $Cu_{67}$  NC. The inset compares the experimental (green) and simulated (orange) isotopic patterns for the peak of  $[Cu_{67}(C \equiv CPh)_{24}(OAc)_{17}+2Cu]^{2+}$ . The molecular formula of  $Cu_{67}$  nanocluster is  $[Cu_{67}(C \equiv CPh)_{24}(OAc)_{18}]^{-}$ .

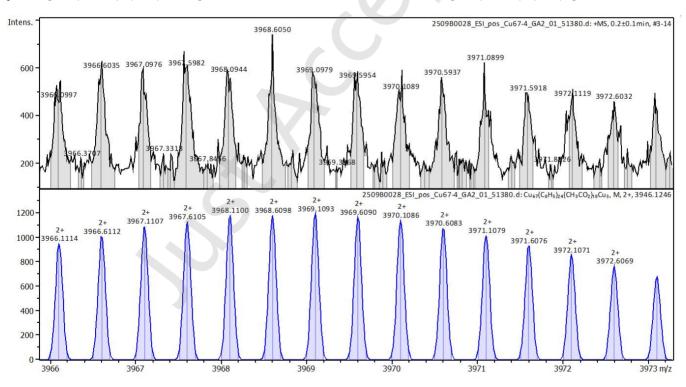


Figure S8. Partial ESI-MS of Cu<sub>67</sub> NC. The experimental (top) and calculated peaks assignable to the [Cu<sub>67</sub>(C≡CPh)<sub>24</sub>(OAc)<sub>18</sub>+3Cu]<sup>2+</sup>.

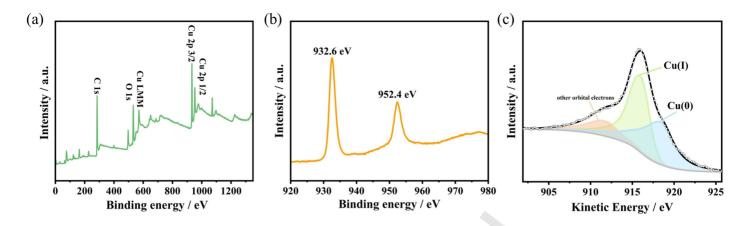


Figure S9. (a) The XPS spectrum of Cu<sub>67</sub>; (b) The Cu 2p high-resolution XPS spectrum of Cu<sub>67</sub>; (C) XPS Auger spectrum of Cu<sub>67</sub>.

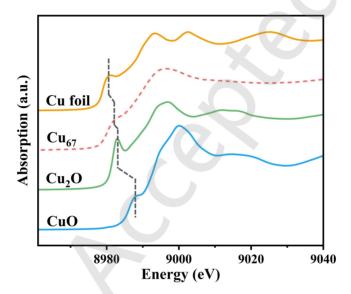


Figure S10. XANES spectrum of Cu<sub>67</sub> and the reference samples.

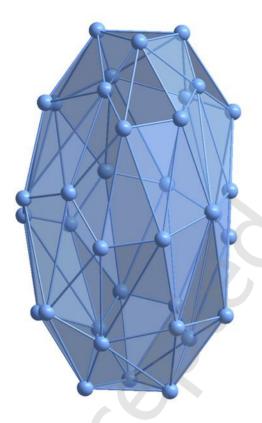


Figure S11. Connecting surfaces of the outer structure of Cu<sub>67</sub>. Color labels: Cu: blue.

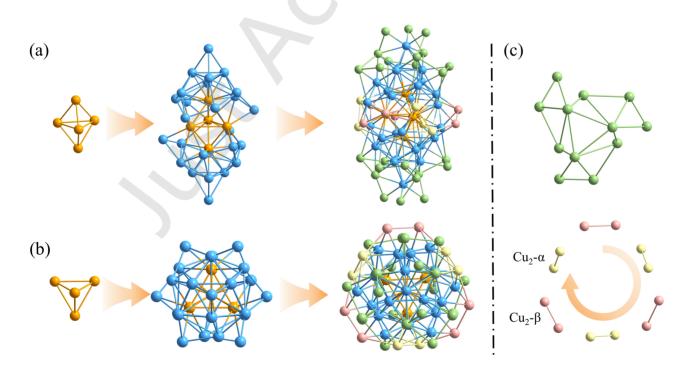


Figure S12. (a) Side and (bb) top views of the  $Cu_{67}$  three-layer structural assembly; (c) Structural demonstration of a  $Cu_{12}$  moiety and six  $Cu_2$  units.

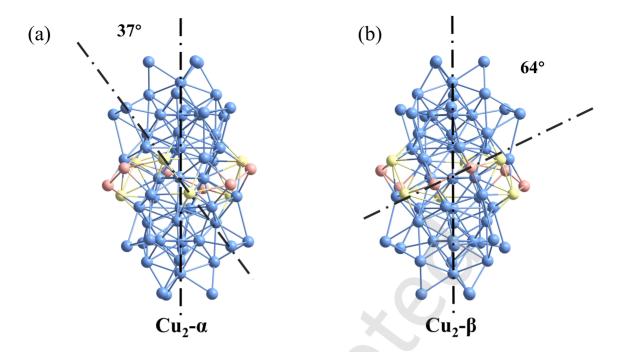


Figure S13. (a)  $Cu_2$ - $\alpha$  unit (yellow) connected to motif B with a torsion angle of ~37° with respect to the  $C_3$  axis; (b)  $Cu_2$ - $\beta$  unit (pink-orange) connected to motif D with a torsion angle of ~64° with respect to the  $C_3$  axis.

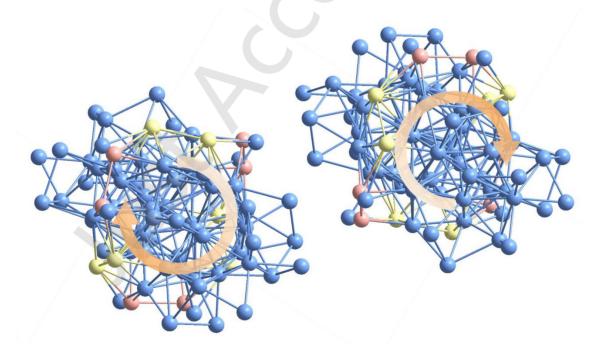


Figure S14. Two chiral enantiomers contained in a single crystal cell of Cu<sub>67</sub>.

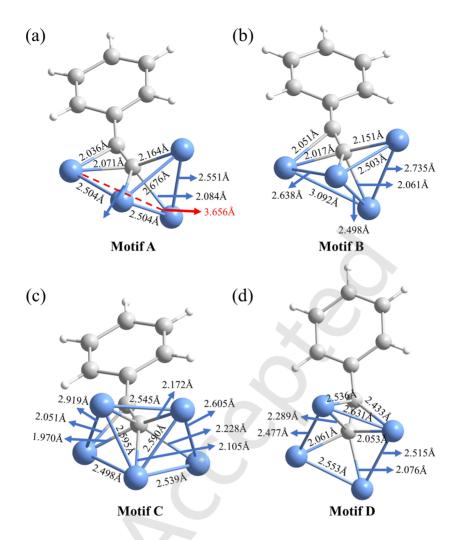
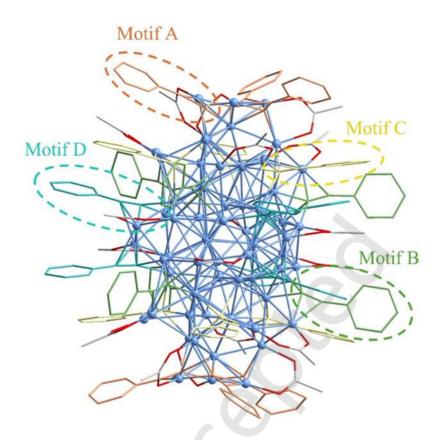


Figure S15. Detailed bond length data for (a) Motif A, (b) Motif B, (c) Motif C and (d) Motif D. Color labels: Cu: blue; C: grey; H: white.



**Figure S16.** Distribution of motif A-D on Cu<sub>67</sub>. Color labels: Cu: blue; O: red; C (Motif A): orange; C (Motif B): green; C (Motif C): yellow; C (Motif D): turquoise; C (Motif E): grey.

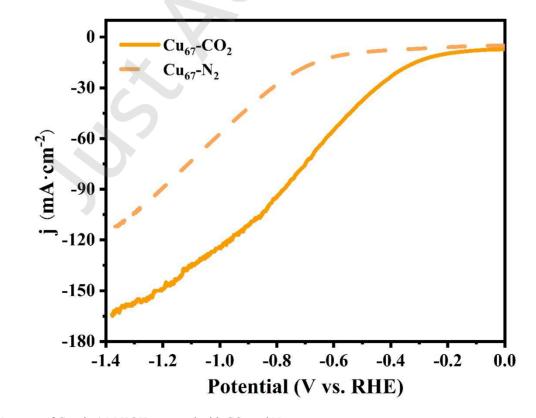


Figure S17. LSV curves of  $Cu_{67}$  in 1 M KOH saturated with  $CO_2$  and  $N_2$ .

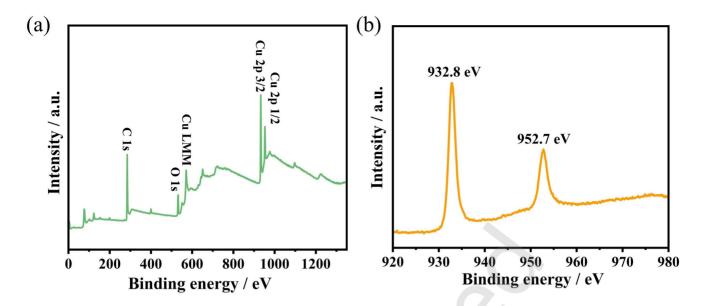


Figure S18. (a) XPS spectrum of Cu<sub>67</sub> after eCO<sub>2</sub>RR; (b) High-resolution Cu 2p XPS spectrum of Cu<sub>67</sub> after eCO<sub>2</sub>RR.

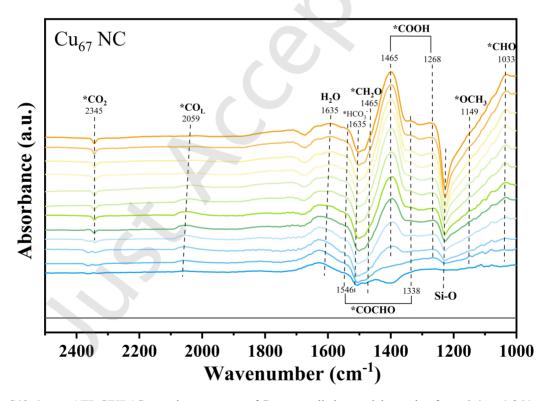


Figure S19. In-situ ATR-SEIRAS complete spectrum of Cu<sub>67</sub> at applied potentials ranging from -0.4 to -1.2 V vs. RHE.

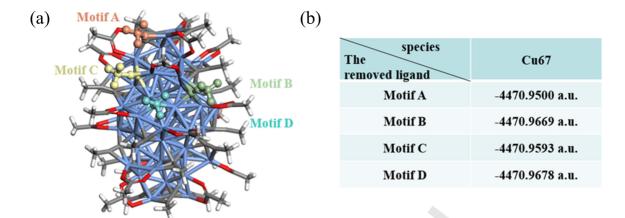


Figure S21. Possible pathways for the formation of ethylene (C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>4</sub>) on Cu<sub>67</sub> at zero applied potential.

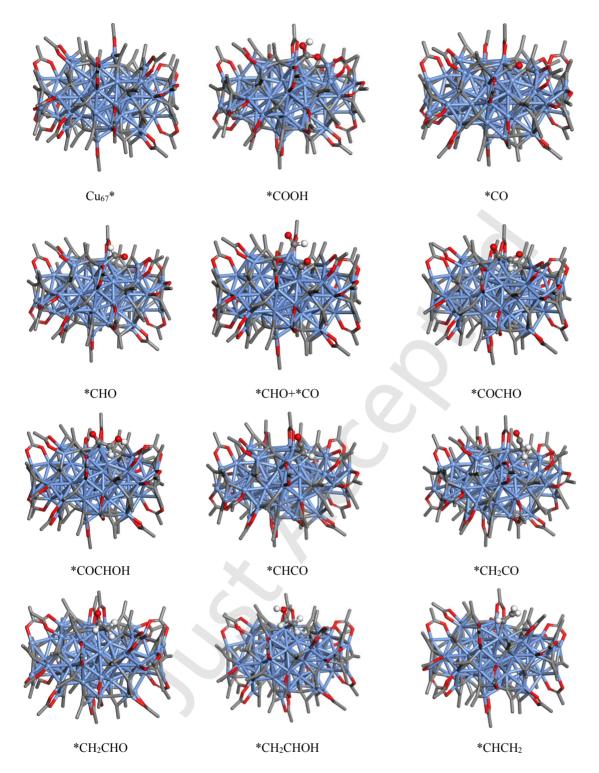


Figure S22. The optimized structure of active sites on  $Cu_{67}$  cluster, and the corresponding intermediate configurations to form CO and  $C_2H_4$ . Color labels: Cu: blue; O: red; C: gray; H: white.

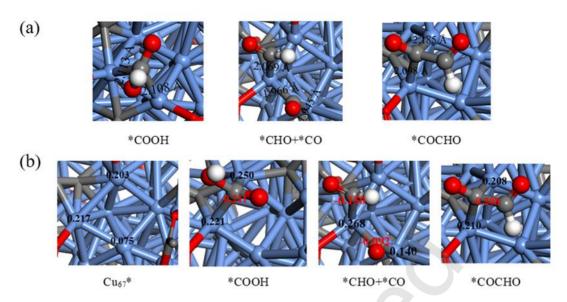


Figure S23. (a) Adsorption structures of \*COOH, \*CHO+\*CO, and \*COCHO intermediates on the  $Cu_{67}$  cluster (b) Hirshfeld charge analysis of the active Cu site in bare and the Cu active sites adsorbed with \*COOH, \*CHO+\*CO and \*COCHO structures.

Table S1. Crystal data and structure refinement of  $Cu_{67}$  nanocluster.

Compound	$[Cu_{67}(C \equiv CPh)_{24}(OAc)_{18}]^{-}$
CCDC No.	2417379
Formula	$C_{228}H_{174}Cu_{67}O_{36}$
Formula weight	7746.84
Temperature/K	149.99(10)
Crystal system	trigonal
Space group	P-31c
a (Å)	19.5711(5)
b (Å)	19.5711(5)
c (Å)	37.4471(12)
α (°)	90
β (°)	90
γ (°)	120
$V(Å^3)$	12421.7(7)
Z	2
$D_c  /  (g \cdot cm^{-3})$	2.071
Absorption coefficient	6.409 mm <sup>-1</sup>
F(000)	7546
Radiation	Cu K $\alpha$ ( $\lambda = 1.54184$ )
Theta (°) range	5.219 to 74.427
Index ranges	$-22 \le h \le 23, -24 \le k \le 20, -41 \le l \le 44$
Reflections collected	72407
Restraints	849
Parameters	578
Goodness-of-fit on F <sup>2</sup>	0.997
$R_{int}$	0.0604
$R_1/wR_2 \ [I{\ge} \ 2\sigma(I)]$	0.0840/0.2358
R <sub>1</sub> /wR <sub>2</sub> (all data)	0.1364/0.2842
Largest diff. peak/hole	0.668 / -0.603 e Å-3

**Table S2.** Comparison of Cu<sub>67</sub> with other high-nuclearity (>50) Cu nanoclusters.

Cu nanocluster molecular formula	Cu valence state	Cu core configuration	Main ligand coordination patterns	Major absorbance peak	Symmetry	Ref.
Cu <sub>67</sub> (CCPh) <sub>24</sub> (OAc) <sub>18</sub>	0-1	Cu <sub>5</sub> Cu <sub>26</sub> Cu <sub>36</sub>		690 nm	C <sub>3</sub>	This work
$[Cu_{61}(S^{t}Bu)_{26}S_{6}Cl_{6}H_{14}]$	0-1	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	335nm, 440nm	Not mentioned	[8]
[Cu <sub>58</sub> H <sub>20</sub> PET <sub>36</sub> (PPh <sub>3</sub> ) <sub>4</sub> ] <sup>2+</sup>	+1	$Cu_{8}@Cu_{6}@Cu_{24}@Cu_{12}@Cu$ 8	$\mu_4$ - $\eta^1$ , $\eta^1$ , $\eta^1$ , $\eta^1$ ; $\mu_3$ - $\eta^1$ , $\eta^1$ , $\eta^1$	Not mentioned	C <sub>2</sub>	[9]
[Cu <sub>57</sub> H <sub>20</sub> PET <sub>36</sub> (PPh <sub>3</sub> ) <sub>4</sub> ] <sup>+</sup>	+1	Cu <sub>8</sub> @Cu <sub>6</sub> @Cu <sub>24</sub> @Cu <sub>12</sub> @Cu 7	$\mu_4$ - $\eta^1$ , $\eta^1$ , $\eta^1$ , $\eta^1$ ; $\mu_3$ - $\eta^1$ , $\eta^1$ , $\eta^1$ ; $\mu_2$ - $\eta^1$ , $\eta^1$	Not mentioned	C <sub>1</sub>	[9]
[Cl@Cu <sub>70</sub> H <sub>22</sub> (CCPh) <sub>29</sub> (CF <sub>3</sub> COO) <sub>16</sub> ] <sup>2+</sup>	+1	Cl@Cu <sub>16</sub> @Cu <sub>43</sub> @Cu <sub>11</sub>	$\begin{split} &\mu_2 \text{-} \eta^1,  \eta^2;  \mu_3 \text{-} \eta^1,  \eta^1,  \eta^2; \\ &\mu_4 \text{-} \eta^1,  \eta^1,  \eta^2,  \eta^2;  \mu_4 \text{-} \eta^1,  \eta^1, \\ &\eta^1,  \eta^2;  \mu_5 \text{-} \eta^1,  \eta^1,  \eta^1,  \eta^1,  \eta^2 \end{split}$	330 nm	C <sub>1</sub>	[10]
[Cu <sub>66</sub> Cl <sub>8</sub> (PPh <sub>3</sub> ) <sub>8</sub> (SC <sub>2</sub> H <sub>5</sub> ) <sub>32</sub> H <sub>24</sub> ](SbF <sub>6</sub> ) <sub>2</sub>	+1	Cu <sub>10</sub> @Cu <sub>24</sub> @Cu <sub>32</sub>	$\mu_4$ - $\eta^1$ , $\eta^1$ , $\eta^1$ , $\eta^1$ ; $\mu_3$ - $\eta^1$ , $\eta^1$ , $\eta^1$	271.5 nm	C <sub>4</sub>	[11]
[(C <sub>2</sub> ) <sub>8</sub> @Cu <sub>50</sub> (mbo) <sub>20</sub> (CF <sub>3</sub> COO) <sub>14</sub> (CH <sub>3</sub> OH) <sub>6</sub> ·2CH <sub>3</sub> OH ]	+1	Not mentioned	$\mu_3$ - $\eta^1$ , $\eta^1$ , $\eta^2$ ; $\mu_3$ - $\eta^1$ , $\eta^2$ , $\eta^2$ ; $\mu_4$ - $\eta^1$ , $\eta^1$ , $\eta^1$ , $\eta^2$	~400 nm	C <sub>1</sub>	[12]
[(C <sub>2</sub> ) <sub>10</sub> @Cu <sub>56</sub> (mbo) <sub>32</sub> (CF <sub>3</sub> COO) <sub>4</sub> (DMF) <sub>2</sub> ][48]	+1	Cu <sub>12</sub> @Cu <sub>44</sub>	Not mentioned	~400 nm	C <sub>2</sub>	[12]

**Table S3.** Coordinates for Cu<sub>67</sub> NC.

Atom type symbol	X	Y	Z
Cu	14.034250	12.277750	8.236750
Cu	13.904500	14.422750	6.884750
Cu	12.507500	14.374750	4.750500
Cu	13.869500	10.039000	9.484500
Cu	16.497250	12.191000	7.830500
Cu	16.133250	9.598500	8.203000
Cu	13.863750	8.281000	11.266500
Cu	15.685000	10.319500	11.176750
Cu	11.550750	9.614750	10.444250
Cu	11.201500	7.556750	11.847000
О	14.457250	16.229250	6.143000
О	13.250000	16.123500	4.321500
О	18.174500	11.606000	7.063000
С	15.481500	13.803250	8.331000
С	14.057000	16.615000	5.084500
0	11.939000	5.756250	11.405500
С	16.582250	14.223250	8.095500

O	17.748750	9.466750	7.220250
С	15.456250	8.724750	9.890750
0	14.038500	6.351500	11.435500
C	16.187000	7.862250	9.505500
С	14.601500	17.984750	4.617000
Н	13.883000	18.493750	4.190500
Н	14.939000	18.480750	5.393000
Н	15.330000	17.844500	3.977750
С	10.806250	13.242000	5.084500
С	13.158250	5.506500	11.390500
С	10.479000	14.263250	4.620750
С	17.058750	6.759750	9.434500
С	18.423750	10.420500	6.857250
С	9.532750	15.269750	4.183000
С	17.640250	15.161000	7.841000
С	9.788750	8.558250	10.743500
С	19.780500	10.201250	6.172750
Н	20.370750	10.959500	6.368000
Н	20.187500	9.376250	6.512250
Н	19.650500	10.128250	5.205500
С	8.004750	6.837000	10.392000
С	9.086750	7.641750	10.646250
С	13.553500	4.058500	11.312000
Н	12.960500	3.591250	10.688500
Н	14.479250	3.989250	10.998250
Н	13.479500	3.651000	12.201250
Cu	11.770750	13.557250	8.236750
Cu	9.978000	12.372250	6.884750
Cu	10.718000	11.186500	4.750500
Cu	13.792000	14.533750	9.484500
Cu	10.614250	15.733750	7.830500
Cu	13.041500	16.714500	8.203000
Cu	15.317250	15.408000	11.266500
Cu	12.641000	15.966000	11.176750
Cu	15.318750	12.738000	10.444250
Cu	17.275750	13.464250	11.847000
0	8.137000	11.947750	6.143000
0	8.832500	10.955000	4.321500
0	10.282250	17.478500	7.063000
С	9.726000	14.048000	8.331000
С	8.003250	11.408250	5.084500
0	18.466250	15.003500	11.405500
С	8.812000	14.791000	8.095500
0	12.347750	18.179500	7.220250

С	14.136750	16.565000	9.890750
0	16.901000	16.524000	11.435500
С	14.518250	17.629250	9.505500
С	6.544750	11.195000	4.617000
Н	6.463250	10.318250	4.190500
Н	5.946250	11.239000	5.393000
Н	6.302000	11.896000	3.977750
С	12.549500	10.279500	5.084500
С	18.072750	16.184250	11.390500
С	11.828750	9.485500	4.620750
С	15.037250	18.935500	9.434500
С	11.184500	18.287250	6.857250
С	11.430250	8.162750	4.183000
С	7.470750	15.238500	7.841000
С	17.114500	11.740250	10.743500
С	10.696000	19.571750	6.172750
Н	9.744000	19.704000	6.368000
Н	11.206750	20.336750	6.512250
Н	10.824000	19.495750	5.205500
С	19.497250	11.055750	10.392000
С	18.259250	11.590500	10.646250
С	19.129250	17.250500	11.312000
Н	19.830250	16.970500	10.688500
Н	18.726250	18.086750	10.998250
Н	19.519250	17.390000	12.201250
Cu	11.794500	10.957250	8.236750
Cu	13.717000	9.997000	6.884750
Cu	14.374000	11.231000	4.750500
Cu	9.938000	12.219500	9.484500
Cu	10.487750	8.867500	7.830500
Cu	8.424750	10.479000	8.203000
Cu	8.418500	13.103250	11.266500
Cu	9.273250	10.506500	11.176750
Cu	10.730000	14.439500	10.444250
Cu	9.122250	15.771000	11.847000
0	15.005000	8.615000	6.143000
О	15.517250	9.713500	4.321500
0	9.142750	7.707500	7.063000
С	12.391750	8.941000	8.331000
С	15.539250	8.768750	5.084500
<del></del>		i e	
О	7.194250	16.032500	11.405500
O C	7.194250 12.205250	16.032500 7.778000	11.405500 8.095500

0	6.660000	13.916750	11.435500
С	6.894000	11.300750	9.505500
С	16.453250	7.612500	4.617000
Н	17.253250	7.980250	4.190500
Н	16.714250	7.072250	5.393000
Н	15.967500	7.051750	3.977750
С	14.243750	13.270500	5.084500
С	6.368500	15.101250	11.390500
С	15.291750	13.043250	4.620750
C	5.503500	11.097000	9.434500
С	7.991250	8.084500	6.857250
С	16.636500	13.359500	4.183000
С	12.488500	6.392500	7.841000
С	10.696000	16.493500	10.743500
С	7.123000	7.019250	6.172750
Н	7.484500	6.128750	6.368000
Н	6.205000	7.079000	6.512250
Н	7.124750	7.168000	5.205500
С	10.097500	18.899250	10.392000
С	10.253500	17.559750	10.646250
С	4.916750	15.483250	11.312000
Н	4.808500	16.230250	10.688500
Н	4.394000	14.716000	10.998250
Н	4.600750	15.751000	12.201250
Cu	11.770750	10.971000	16.534250
Cu	9.978000	12.155750	17.886500
Cu	10.718000	13.341500	20.020500
Cu	13.792000	9.994250	15.286500
Cu	10.614250	8.794500	16.940500
Cu	13.041500	7.813500	16.568000
Cu	15.317250	9.120250	13.504500
Cu	12.641000	8.562250	13.594500
Cu	15.318750	11.790250	14.326750
Cu	17.275750	11.063750	12.924250
0	8.137000	12.580250	18.628000
0	8.832500	13.573000	20.449750
0	10.282250	7.049500	17.708000
С	9.726000	10.480250	16.440000
С	8.003250	13.119750	19.686500
0	18.466250	9.524500	13.365500
С	8.812000	9.737000	16.675750
0	12.347750	6.348500	17.551000
	12.517750		
С	14.136750	7.963000	14.880250

C C H H C C C C C C C C	14.518250 6.544750 6.463250 5.946250 6.302000 12.549500 18.072750	6.898750 13.333250 14.210000 13.289000 12.632000 14.248500	15.265500 20.154250 20.580500 19.378250 20.793500
H H C C C C	6.463250 5.946250 6.302000 12.549500 18.072750	14.210000 13.289000 12.632000	20.580500 19.378250
H H C C C C	5.946250 6.302000 12.549500 18.072750	13.289000 12.632000	19.378250
H C C C C C	6.302000 12.549500 18.072750	12.632000	
C C C C	12.549500 18.072750		20.793500
C C C	18.072750	14.248500	
C C			19.686500
С	11.000750	8.343750	13.380500
	11.828750	15.042500	20.150500
C	15.037250	5.592750	15.336750
	11.184500	6.240750	17.913750
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С	17.114500	12.787750	14.027500
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Н	9.744000	4.824000	18.403000
Н	11.206750	4.191250	18.258750
Н	10.824000	5.032250	19.565500
С	19.497250	13.472250	14.379000
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С	19.129250	7.277750	13.459000
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Cu	11.794500	13.570750	16.534250
Cu	13.717000	14.531000	17.886500
Cu	14.374000	13.297250	20.020500
Cu	9.938000	12.308750	15.286500
Cu	10.487750	15.660500	16.940500
Cu	8.424750	14.049000	16.568000
Cu	8.418500	11.425000	13.504500
Cu	9.273250	14.021500	13.594500
Cu	10.730000	10.088500	14.326750
Cu	9.122250	8.757000	12.924250
0	15.005000	15.913000	18.628000
0	15.517250	14.814500	20.449750
0	9.142750	16.820500	17.708000
С	12.391750	15.587000	16.440000
С	15.539250	15.759250	19.686500
0	7.194250	8.495500	13.365500
C	12.205250	16.750000	16.675750
0	7.503000	15.382250	17.551000
С	8.006500	13.025750	14.880250
0	6.660000	10.611500	13.335500
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С	16.453250	16.915500	20.154250
Н	17.253250	16.548000	20.580500
Н	16.714250	17.456000	19.378250
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С	14.243750	11.257500	19.686500
С	6.368500	9.426750	13.380500
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С	16.636500	11.168500	20.588000
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Н	7.484500	18.399500	18.403000
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Н	7.124750	17.360000	19.565500
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Н	4.394000	9.812000	13.772750
Н	4.600750	8.777000	12.569750
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Cu	13.904500	10.105500	17.886500
Cu	12.507500	10.153250	20.020500
Cu	13.869500	14.489250	15.286500
Cu	16.497250	12.337000	16.940500
Cu	16.133250	14.929500	16.568000
Cu	13.863750	16.247000	13.504500
Cu	15.685000	14.208500	13.594500
Cu	11.550750	14.913500	14.326750
Cu	11.201500	16.971500	12.924250
0	14.457250	8.298750	18.628000
0	13.250000	8.404500	20.449750
0	18.174500	12.922000	17.708000
С	15.481500	10.725000	16.440000
С	14.057000	7.913000	19.686500
0	11.939000	18.772000	13.365500
С	16.582250	10.305000	16.675750
0	17.748750	15.061250	17.551000
С	15.456250	15.803250	14.880250
0	14.038500	18.176500	13.335500
С	İ		
	16.187000	16.666000	15.265500

Н	13.883000	6.034250	20.580500
Н	14.939000	6.047250	19.378250
Н	15.330000	6.683750	20.793500
С	10.806250	11.286000	19.686500
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С	18.423750	14.107500	17.913750
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С	17.640250	9.367000	16.930000
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Н	12.960500	20.936750	14.082500
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Cu	12.533250	12.264000	6.097250
Cu	12.533250	12.264000	10.390750
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Cu	13.385500	10.787500	12.385500
Н	8.470750	14.898500	4.367000
Н	9.678000	15.469500	3.070000
Н	9.705000	16.233250	4.767750
Н	16.613000	13.690750	3.092500
Н	17.296500	12.435750	4.285750
Н	17.057500	14.201000	4.826750
Н	11.960250	7.377000	4.816750
Н	11.715000	8.023000	3.088000
Н	10.302250	8.047500	4.300000
Н	17.646750	15.436000	6.734750
Н	18.640250	14.691000	8.121500
Н	17.473500	16.100500	8.465000
Н	19.741750	11.173500	9.284750
Н		0.040250	10.665500
11	19.496750	9.949250	10.003300
Н	19.496750 20.281500	11.600750	11.014500

Н	11.918500	5.745250	8.586250
Н	13.607500	6.206500	7.954000
Н	15.310250	19.177500	8.354500
Н	15.968500	19.010500	10.087750
Н	14.253500	19.676250	9.803500
Н	15.044500	5.129500	14.295000
Н	14.386250	4.962250	16.028500
Н	16.101500	5.628250	15.744000
Н	17.273000	6.514500	8.342000
Н	16.574000	5.859000	9.938000
Н	18.035000	7.012500	9.965750
Н	6.741500	14.384000	8.036500
Н	7.381250	15.573500	6.755000
Н	7.224750	16.112750	8.529750
Н	5.263750	10.015000	9.701750
Н	5.141000	11.316250	8.376000
Н	4.979250	11.794750	10.168000
Н	8.228250	5.777000	10.746500
Н	7.794000	6.826750	9.271750
Н	7.093500	7.239000	10.946500
Н	10.733250	5.336500	15.279000
Н	10.428500	5.028250	13.468500
Н	9.001000	5.409500	14.601000
Н	10.098500	8.359000	21.001500
Н	8.891250	8.930250	19.704500
Н	8.864000	9.693750	21.402250
Н	7.182250	17.076500	14.874500
Н	7.616500	18.126250	13.399750
Н	8.317000	18.538750	15.074500
H	9.375250	19.348500	11.151000
Н	9.680000	19.040250	9.340500
Н	11.107500	19.421500	10.473000
Н	17.365000	11.333750	19.727000
Н	16.681500	10.078750	20.920250
Н	16.920500	11.844000	21.461250
Н	18.193750	9.145750	15.958250
Н	17.200000	8.400750	17.345000
Н	18.366750	9.810250	17.688500
Н	10.691500	16.273500	21.451250
Н	10.936500	16.919250	19.722500
Н	12.349500	16.944000	20.934500
Н	17.315250	18.118500	14.282500
Н	18.014000	17.463000	15.878750

Н	12.962500	18.602500	16.004500
Н	13.208500	18.221000	17.809750
Н	4.992250	12.459000	15.642250
Н	5.115000	13.760500	14.316750
Н	5.276750	14.238750	16.108500
Н	19.938250	13.886000	13.412750
Н	20.183250	12.661500	14.793500
Н	19.398500	14.313250	15.142500
Н	7.490250	8.198500	17.260000
Н	6.850500	9.388000	15.978500
Н	7.007000	9.927500	17.753250
Н	11.519250	18.682250	17.177500

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