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Microscopic origin of chiral shape induction in achiral crystals

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In biominalisation, inorganic materials are formed with a remarkable control of shape and morphology. Chirality, as present in the biomolecular world, is therefore also common for biominerals. Bio-macromolecules, like proteins and polysaccharides are in direct contact with the mineral phase and act as modifiers during nucleation and crystal growth. Due to their homochirality – they exist only as one of two possible mirror symmetric isomers – their handedness is often transferred into the macroscopic shape of the biomineral crystals, but yet the way in which handedness is transmitted into achiral materials is not understood at the atomic level. By using the submolecular resolution capability of scanning tunnelling microscopy, we show how the chiral ‘buckybowl’ hemibuckminsterfullerene arranges copper surface atoms in its vicinity into a chiral morphology. We anticipate that such new insight will find its way into materials synthesis techniques.

Influencing the macroscopic shape of a crystal during growth requires molecular tectonics, i.e., adsorbed molecules that arrange and stabilize new sites at the surface of the material\textsuperscript{1}. 
Today, crystallization at the crystal/liquid interface can be investigated at high resolution with scanning probe microscopy, but so far such studies have addressed only the growth of the mineral phase itself\textsuperscript{2,3}. Previous investigations have addressed the reorganization of inorganic surfaces by achiral and chiral molecules\textsuperscript{4-7}. However, the microscopic role that molecules play during crystal growth, for example as surfactants at step edges, remains poorly understood\textsuperscript{8,9}. All steps of crystal growth, including adsorption of atoms or molecules from the liquid or gas phase onto the crystal surface, migration across the surface and along step edges, incorporation at kink or step sites, and nucleation of new islands, are also available at the metal–vacuum interface. This opens a way to study molecular tectonics and crystal growth with the high precision provided by scanning tunnelling microscopy (STM)\textsuperscript{10}. The Cu(110) surface, with its high mobility of top-layer atoms at room temperature\textsuperscript{11}, provides an excellent model system for studying initial steps of crystal shaping by molecules. In order to significantly influence the morphology of the crystal, the organic modifier needs to interact sufficiently with the inorganic material. For the most abundant biomineral calcite, for example, dicarboxylic acids have been identified as efficient modifiers, because both carboxylate groups interact strongly with calcium ions\textsuperscript{12}. In the case of copper, polar molecules like carboxylic acids, amino acids and chiral ketones have been identified as suitable chiral modifiers for induction of handed shape into the crystal surface\textsuperscript{6,13-18}. However, as the binding configurations of the molecules at the kink sites were poorly resolved, a microscopic picture of chiral recognition and chiral crystal surface formation has not been obtained so far. Here we show that the aromatic chiral buckybow bowl hemifullerene (C\textsubscript{30}H\textsubscript{12}, Fig. 1a), basically representing half of a C\textsubscript{60} buckyball and lacking any functional groups, can also act as a crystal shape modifier. We find that certain chiral kinks are stabilized by metal-organic coordination bonds, whereby opposite mirror isomers, so-called enantiomers, create opposite chiral kinks. In our work, the absolute handedness of the molecules is obtained with submolecular resolution STM in combination with synchrotron radiation X-ray photoelectron diffraction (XPD), disclosing the orientation of the bowl at the chiral kink sites. The exact binding geometry of the chiral buckybow at the kink is identified via density functional theory (DFT), which reveals that the chiral recognition of hemifullerene at the Cu(110) surface can be explained with the classical three point contact model.
Results and discussion

After deposition of ~15% of a close-packed monolayer of the racemic (1:1) mixture of \( M \)- and \( P \)-enantiomers\(^{19} \) at room temperature (RT) and cooling to 50 K, the Cu surface shows remarkable signs of restructuring. Step edges exhibit a pronounced saw-tooth shape with straight segments parallel to the \([\bar{3}3\bar{4}]\) and \([\bar{3}3\bar{4}]\) directions of the surface plane (Fig. 1b). In addition, islands with an asymmetric shape are formed on the terraces, with their edges also aligned along the \([\bar{3}3\bar{4}]\) and \([\bar{3}3\bar{4}]\) directions (Fig. 1c). Each of these directions breaks the mirror symmetry of the underlying Cu(110) surface, and all step edges are decorated with hemifullerene molecules. Single hemifullerene molecules on the flat terraces are only observed at low temperatures (Fig. 1b), because they are too mobile at room temperature to be imaged by STM (Fig. 1c).

The asymmetric shape of the islands and the mirror symmetry breaking direction of the step edges suggest an enantioselective decoration. That is, \([\bar{3}3\bar{4}]\) steps are decorated with one type of enantiomer and the \([\bar{3}3\bar{4}]\) steps with the other. The equal STM appearance of molecules at the same type of step indeed supports this conclusion. Very narrow elongated islands are also observed, which are decorated with one enantiomer only (Fig. 2 a,c,d). Considering the \( C_3 \)-symmetry of the hemifullerene molecules, it is not possible to assign the absolute handedness solely from STM. If the \( C_3 \) axis of the molecular bowl were normal to the surface, then the three uppermost C6 rings would be at identical height above the surface and, hence, it would be impossible to determine the intrinsic handedness of a hemifullerene molecule via STM. However, all molecules show a pronounced contrast in STM due to a tilted adsorption geometry. With the knowledge of the exact adsorption geometry, it becomes therefore possible to conclude on the handedness from STM. Detailed conclusions on the orientation of the molecule on the surface is achieved here with XPD\(^{20} \). Because XPD is an averaging technique for a larger surface area, both surface species – terrace and step edge molecules – as well as their relative abundance need to be taken into account. Using the ratio of step and terrace molecules at a given coverage – obtained by counting the molecules in large-scale STM images – the best fit to the XPD pattern was obtained with a tilt of the molecular \( C_3 \) axis away from the surface normal by 10° at the terrace and 18° at the step edge (Supplementary Figures 1-3; for details on the XPD data analysis see the Supplementary Information).
With the knowledge of the adsorbate geometry, in particular the polar tilt angle and the tilt direction of the molecular bowl, the STM appearance has been modelled and compared to the experimental results (Fig. 2). As previously observed for the buckybowl corannulene^{21,22}, semifullerene interacts with its convex side with the Cu surface. On flat terraces, three bright lobes in the STM appearance of a single molecule coincide with the three outer C6 rings (Fig. 2e-g). They are imaged at different intensity, reflecting that the molecule is slightly tilted by 10° (Fig. 2h). This fact allows the determination of the molecular handedness by modelling the STM appearance for a given tilt of the C3 axis of the bowl (Fig. 2g). A clockwise height decrease of the three C6 rings identifies an M-enantiomer (Fig. 2g), whereas a counterclockwise height decrease is assigned to the P-enantiomer (see Supplementary Figure 1). However, the adsorption geometry at the step edge differs substantially from the one on the terraces. Because of the larger tilt of the molecular bowl of 18° along a different direction (see Supplementary Figure 1), the height-decrease sequence of the three outer C6 rings turns into the opposite sense for the same enantiomer on the step edge with respect to the situation on the flat terrace. The M-enantiomer shows for example a clockwise contrast sequence on the terrace (Fig. 2e-h), but a counterclockwise contrast sequence at the step edge (Fig. 2i-l). For correct assignment of the contrast sequence of molecules that are not isolated, e.g., molecules decorating a step edge in a single line, we started the analysis at the end of the line (corner molecule), in order to make sure that only lobes from the same single molecule were evaluated. Altogether, such detailed contrast analysis of this complex situation reveals that step edges running parallel to the [\(\bar{3}\bar{3}\bar{4}\)] direction are exclusively decorated with M-enantiomers and step edges running parallel to the [\(\bar{3}\bar{3}4\)] direction are decorated only with P-enantiomers (for details see Supplementary Figure 4).

Molecular and stereoselective recognition at crystal surfaces has been known for some time^{23-25}, and that enantiomers bind preferentially to chiral kinks has been shown before^{26-31}. By contrast, here the chiral kinks are created by a chiral molecule. A step edge running along the [\(\bar{3}\bar{3}4\)] direction has chiral R-kinks; the one running along the [\(\bar{3}\bar{3}4\)] direction has S-kinks (Fig. 3). With a kink periodicity of 1.053 nm they basically span over two closed-packed Cu rows of this (110) surface. For stepped and kinked face centred cubic (fcc) crystal surfaces, special notations have been proposed^{32}. The R/S denominators for the handedness of kinks are based on the clockwise or counter clockwise sequence of (100), (110), and (111)
facets at the kink, involving a lower terrace facet (Supplementary Figure 5)\textsuperscript{26}. From this it follows that $M$-hemifullerene creates $R$-kinks and $P$-hemifullerene $S$-kinks.

In order to understand how the molecule creates a chiral kink, the exact bonding situation at the kink has been evaluated with DFT calculations. The most stable adsorption configurations of $M$-enantiomers at the $R$- and $S$-kinks have been searched by simulated annealing molecular dynamics calculations (see Methods for details). After geometrical optimization, the $M$-enantiomer at the $R$-kink site is indeed found to be the most favourable configuration (for a comparison of the configurations determined from DFT and from the XPD analysis, see Supplementary Figure 6). Or in other words, $M$-hemifullerene can only stabilize an $R$-kink Cu atom at the upper step because of such bonding configuration. With a total binding energy of 4.66 eV, the adsorbate is stabilized by 0.14 eV over the lowest energy configuration of an $M$-hemifullerene located at an $S$-kink site (see Supplementary Figure 7), and by 0.5 eV over a $M$-hemifullerene at a straight step edge (see Supplementary Figure 8). This energy difference is at the upper level of previously reported values of enantioselectivity (0.01 to 0.14 eV) for chiral kink adsorption\textsuperscript{28-31} whereby the largest experimental values do not exceed 0.04 eV\textsuperscript{33,34}.

The nature of the chemical bonding has been evaluated via charge density difference distribution analysis (Fig. 4 d-f). It reveals that chiral kink creation is driven by three $\eta^1$-coordinated Cu-C bond, i.e., a single bond is formed between a Cu surface atom and a carbon atom, and three $\eta^2$-coordinated Cu-C bonds, i.e., each bond goes from a single Cu atom to two adjacent carbon atoms of the molecule (Fig. 4, Supplementary Figure 9). The six carbon atoms involved in the three $\eta^2$ bonds are all located in the central C6 ring of the hemifullerene, from which one of the $\eta^2$ bonds goes to the kink atom. The two other $\eta^2$ bonds go to adjacent Cu atoms on the lower terrace. A similar two-Cu-atom binding site in the lower terrace establishes two $\eta^1$ bonds to C-atoms in the same C5 ring (labeled 2 & 3 in Supplementary Figure 9a), while the remaining $\eta^1$ bond goes to a step edge atom next to the kink atom. All bond lengths are between 2.11 Å and 2.27 Å. The four Cu atoms of the binding site on the lower terrace represent a single (110) surface unit cell. When viewed from above, going from this terrace site via the step binding site to the kink atom is performed in a clockwise fashion for the $M$-hemifullerene/$R$-kink complex, but in a counterclockwise fashion in the case of the $P$-hemifullerene/$S$-kink complex. Hence, these three mirror-like binding sites involved in the chiral recognition of hemifullerene at the Cu(110) surface are a manifestation of the classical three point contact model of chiral
recognition. The relatively strong Cu metal-fullerene interaction leads to the effect that at room temperature diffusing Cu atoms are captured by the hemifullerene molecules and the surface becomes restructured in the observed manner. This also leads to the formation of homochiral hemifullerene stabilized adatom wires. Adsorption of only one enantiomer would lead to single-handed structures and to stabilisation of only one type of nanowire or handed material. For the particular case of hemifullerene, however, all attempts to separate the enantiomers were unfortunately unsuccessful so far.

Conclusions

In conclusion, we have shown under abiotic conditions and using submolecular-resolution STM, XPD and DFT calculations that the chiral geodesic hydrocarbon hemibuckminsterfullerene restructures a metal surface in such a way that chirality is imprinted onto the metal. Such a restructuring can be considered as the first step towards the modification of achiral crystals into a chiral shape. At the microscopic level, chiral recognition occurs here via metal-organic coordination bonding between copper atoms near step edges and specific molecular binding sites. Mobile Cu adatoms are immobilized into homochiral nanowires or chiral islands. Although a special example of restructuring of a crystal (aromatic molecule and apolar metal), our example here involves the elementary processes, such as formation of kinks and chiral recognition at surfaces, that are of paramount importance for shape induction in biomineralisation. Beyond step edge propagation and step edge morphology, which were previously studied for biominerals with scanning probe microscopy, our work now also reveals detailed insight into the interplay between the molecular modifier and the inorganic mineral phase.

Methods

Hemifullerene was synthesized according to the method of Scott et al. Experiments were carried out in two independent ultrahigh vacuum (UHV) systems. The variable-temperature STM system (Omicron Nanotechnology) is equipped with low-energy electron diffraction (LEED) and standard surface preparation facilities. The Cu(110) single-crystal was prepared by repeated cycles of sputtering with argon ions (typically at an argon pressure of 2×10⁻⁵ mbar and an acceleration voltage of 1.5 kV) and annealing at ~ 700 K. Before deposition of hemifullerene, cleanliness and surface order were checked by LEED and STM. Hemifullerene was sublimated from a Knudsen-cell type evaporator at a temperature of 480
K, while the Cu(110) substrate was held at room temperature. STM images were acquired in constant-current mode either at room temperature or at a sample temperature of ~ 50 K. The XPD experiments were performed at the NearNode endstation of the Surface and Interface Microscopy Beamline of the Swiss Light Source using linearly polarized synchrotron X-ray radiation of 920 eV. The C 1s ($E_{\text{kin}} = 626$ eV) XPD patterns were collected with the sample held at room temperature. Single scattering cluster (SSC) simulations were used to find the molecular orientation yielding the lowest reliability factor ($R$ factor) and hence the best agreement with experiment. Backscattering from substrate atoms was neglected since the backscattering yield is very low within the kinetic-energy range used for this work (>400 eV).

DFT calculations were performed using the Vienna ab initio simulation package (VASP) in a generalized gradient approximation (GGA). The projector augmented wave (PAW) method was employed. The van der Waals (vdW) interactions were described by the method of Tkatchenko and Scheffler (DFT-TS), which significantly improves the accuracy for aromatic molecules on metal substrates. The periodic slab models include four Cu layers, a kinked step, the $M$-enantiomer of hemifullerene (a total of 161 atoms), and a vacuum layer larger than 19 Å. The most stable adsorption configurations of $M$-hemifullerene at different kinked steps were searched by the simulated annealing method based on molecular dynamics calculations, which is widely used in structure prediction without requiring reasonable structural inputs but relying on temperature evolution in time. The annealing starts with configurations far from equilibrium. The systems were then cooled down from 300 K to 0 K in 9 ps with 2 fs time steps and further relaxed at 0 K. The slow annealing process allows the molecule to cover a sufficiently large phase space and to find the most stable adsorption configuration. In the optimization process, the bottom three Cu layers were frozen. The surface Cu layer, the kinked step edge atoms and the molecule were fully relaxed until the residual forces were smaller than 0.015 eV/Å. A 400 eV energy cutoff for the plane-wave basis sets and Γ-point k-sampling in reciprocal space were used.

References


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**Author contributions**

R.F. & K.H.E. perceived the experiments. W.X., T.G. & R.F. performed the experiments and data analysis. K.P., Y.Z., E.B. & W.H. conducted the theoretical modelling. L. P. & L.T.S. conducted the chemical synthesis. W.X., K.H.E. and R.F. wrote the manuscript with contributions from all authors.

**Additional information**

Supplementary information and chemical compound information are available in the online version of the paper. Reprints and permissions information is available online at www.nature.com/reprints. Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to R.F..

**Competing financial interests**

The authors declare no competing financial interests.
**Figure 1 | Initial steps of chiral faceting of Cu(110) by hemifullerene.** (a) Ball-and-stick models of $M$- and $P$-hemifullerene (C$_{30}$H$_{12}$), looking towards their concave side. (b) STM image ($U = -2.0$ V; $I = 22$ pA, $T = 50$ K) acquired after deposition of 15% of a complete monolayer of hemifullerene at room temperature. Instead of linear step edges along $[\bar{1}10]$, as observed for clean Cu(110), the step edges are decorated with molecules and have a zigzag shape, exhibiting $[\bar{3}3\bar{4}]$ and $[\bar{3}3\bar{4}]$ directions. On the (110) terraces single molecules, nanowires and elongated islands with edges aligned along the $[3\bar{3}\bar{4}]$ and $[\bar{3}3\bar{4}]$ directions are observed. (c) STM image ($U = -2.0$ V; $I = 23$ pA, $T = 300$ K) of a step-free surface region acquired at room temperature. Decorated 2D islands are still observed on the terrace, with straight edges also running parallel to $[\bar{3}3\bar{4}]$ and $[\bar{3}3\bar{4}]$ directions. Single molecules are not observed between the decorated islands, but streaky features indicate diffusing molecules.
Figure 2 | Determination of the absolute handedness of hemifullerene molecules. (a) STM image showing elongated islands decorated with hemifullerene molecules and single hemifullerene molecules on the flat terrace (T = 50 K, U = −2.3 V; I = 23 pA). (b-d) Enantioselective step decoration of 2D Cu islands and Cu metal wires. Steps and wires running parallel to the [3̅3̅4] direction are decorated with $M$-enantiomers, those running parallel to the [3̅3̅4] direction are decorated with $P$-enantiomers (T = 300 K, U = −2.0 V; I = 23 pA for image b, U = −2.4 V; I = 35 pA for images c, d). (e, f) Side and top views of the best-fit molecular orientation of $M$-hemifullerene on the terrace, as obtained from XPD. The molecular C$_3$ axis is inclined by 10° with respect to the surface normal. The heights of the C6-rings above the surface plane are marked as highest (1), middle (2) and lowest (3), which gives rise to the different intensities of the three protrusions observed in STM images. (g) Simulation of STM appearance for a molecule on the flat terrace. In connection with the
knowledge of the tilt angle the absolute handedness is determined from the sequence of intensity (highest to lowest) of the three lobes. (h) STM image showing individual hemifullerene molecules on a flat Cu(110) terrace, and the assignment of their handedness (T=50 K, U = –2.32 V, I = 30 pA). (i,j) Side and top views of the molecular orientation of \( M \)-hemifullerene at a step edge, as obtained from XPD. The molecular \( C_3 \) axis is inclined by 18° with respect to the surface normal. (k,l) Simulation of STM appearance of an \( M \)-enantiomer located at a step edge and an STM image (U = –2.2 V; I = 23 pA) showing both enantiomers at a corner of a 2D island.
Figure 3 | Structure models for homochiral step edges. (a) Hard-sphere model of the observed step edge with alternating $[\overline{3}34]$ and $[\overline{3}34]$ segments and the formation of chiral kink sites. (b) Structure model of the observed steps along $[\overline{3}34]$ and $[\overline{3}34]$ with hemifullerene decoration. $M$-enantiomers decorate $R$-kinks, $P$-enantiomers decorate $S$-kinks. (c) Structural model of an adatom island stabilized by $M$- and $P$-hemifullerene. (d) Structural model of an $M$-hemifullerene stabilized Cu adatom nanowire running along the $[\overline{3}34]$ direction.
Figure 4 | Single M-hemifullerene (R)-kink complex. Top (a), front (b) and side (c) views of M-hemifullerene bound to an R-kink as obtained by DFT calculations. Cu atoms of lower terrace appear light brown, Cu atoms at upper terrace appear dark brown. The bonds are identified via charge density distribution calculations (d-f). Charge depletion is marked in red, charge accumulation in blue with a contour value of 0.06 e/Å³. Chirality transfer from the molecule to the metal arises via three η²– and three η¹–coordinative bonds to Cu atoms of the metal substrate. One of each type of bond goes to kink atoms, the others to atoms located in the lower terrace.
Supplementary Information

Microscopic origin of chiral shape induction in achiral crystals

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Contents

1) Additional analysis
   a) Analysis of hemifullerene C 1s X-ray Photoelectron Diffraction (XPD) data

2) Additional Data
   a) Figure 1. XPD analysis of molecular orientations
   b) Figure 2. Photoelectron diffraction from surface-adsorbed hemifullerene
   c) Figure 3. SSC calculations for various hemifullerene orientations
   d) Figure 4. Enantioselective step decoration of 2D Cu islands and Cu adatom nanowires
   e) Figure 5. Definition of R and S kinks
   f) Figure 6. Comparison of molecular orientation at the kinked step edge as obtained from DFT and XPD
   g) Figure 7. Optimized configuration of M-hemifullerene at the S-kink
   h) Figure 8. Optimized configuration of M-hemifullerene at the step edge along the \{\bar{1}10\} direction
   i) Figure 9. C-Cu bond length analysis for M-hemifullerene at the R-kink

3) References
1) Additional analysis

a) Analysis of hemifullerene C 1s X-ray Photoelectron Diffraction (XPD) data

Supplementary Figure 1a shows the C 1s XPD data acquired from hemifullerene adsorbed on Cu(110). C 1s XPD patterns were measured in forward scattering condition (Ekin=626 eV) and are represented as stereographic projections in grey scale (white: maximum intensity). The centre corresponds to normal emission and the border to the maximum grazing angle measured (88°). The orientation of the substrate, as determined by an XPD pattern of the Cu 3p core level, is also indicated. In order to enhance the statistical accuracy, the experimental patterns have been azimuthally averaged, exploiting the twofold symmetry of the substrate. This procedure did not produce any extra features with respect to the raw data.

Photoelectron diffraction patterns \( I(\theta, \phi) \) from the adsorbed hemifullerene C 1s level were acquired at room temperature for extensive sets of emission angles \( (\theta, \phi) \), with \( 0 \leq \theta \leq 88^\circ \) and \( 0 \leq \phi \leq 360^\circ \). Data sets from four different sample preparations were analysed, determined to be equivalent and thus merged into the averaged data set \( I_{\text{EXP}}(\theta, \phi) \) shown in Supplementary Figure 1a.

For further analysis and comparison with simulations, this pattern was expanded in terms of spherical harmonics, resulting in the experimental set of multipole coefficients \( a_{lm}^{\text{EXP}} \), with \( l=0,1,...,60 \) and \( m=-l,...,+l \):

\[
I_{\text{EXP}}(\theta, \phi) = \sum_{l,m} a_{lm}^{\text{EXP}} \cdot Y_{lm}(\theta, \phi)
\]  

(1)

where the multipole coefficients \( a_{lm}^{\text{EXP}} \) are obtained from

\[
a_{lm}^{\text{EXP}} = \frac{1}{4\pi} \int I_{\text{EXP}}(\theta, \phi) \cdot Y_{lm}^*(\theta, \phi) d\Omega
\]  

(2)

Here, the \( Y_{lm}^*(\theta, \phi) \) are the complex conjugates of the spherical harmonics, and \( I_{\text{EXP}}(\theta, \phi) \) is the oscillatory part of the diffraction pattern obtained by normalization with respect to the average intensity \( \langle I(\theta) \rangle \phi \) for each polar angle theta:

\[
\chi(\theta, \phi) = \frac{I(\theta, \phi) - \langle I(\theta) \rangle \phi}{\langle I(\theta) \rangle \phi}
\]  

(3)

In order to determine the molecular orientation(s) of the hemifullerene on Cu(110) giving rise to the experimentally obtained XPD pattern \( I_{\text{EXP}}(\theta, \phi) \), a simulated diffraction pattern \( I_{\text{SSC}}(\theta, \phi) \) for the \( \text{M-} \)
enantiomer of hemifullerene adsorbed with its \( C_3 \) symmetry axis perpendicular to the surface was computed by means of single-scattering cluster (SSC) theory (Supplementary Figure 2). Again, the pattern was expanded in terms of spherical harmonics, resulting in the calculated set of multipole coefficients \( a_{lm}^{\text{SSC}} \), with \( l=0,1,...,60 \) and \( m=-l,...,+l \):

\[
I_{\text{SSC}}(\theta, \phi) = \sum_{l,m} a_{lm}^{\text{SSC}} \cdot Y_{lm}(\theta, \phi)
\]  

(4)

where the multipole coefficients \( a_{lm}^{\text{SSC}} \) are obtained from

\[
a_{lm}^{\text{SSC}} = \frac{1}{4\pi} \int I_{\text{SSC}}(\theta, \phi) \cdot Y_{lm}^*(\theta, \phi) d\Omega
\]  

(5)
\( \chi^{SSC}(\theta, \varphi) \) is the oscillatory part of the calculated diffraction pattern obtained by normalization with respect to the average intensity \( I(\theta) \) for each polar angle \( \theta \) (eq. 3).

The agreement between experiment \( I^{\text{EXP}}(\theta, \varphi) \) and calculation \( I^{SSC}(\theta, \varphi) \) was quantified by means of a reliability factor \( (R \text{ factor}) \) \( R_{MP} \) based on the space of multipole expansion coefficients:

\[
R_{MP} = \frac{\sum_{l=0}^{l_{\text{max}}} \sum_{m=-l}^{l} |a_{lm}^{SSC} - a_{lm}^{\text{EXP}}|}{\sum_{l=0}^{l_{\text{max}}} \sum_{m=-l}^{l} |a_{lm}^{SSC}|}
\]

(6)

Setting \( l_{\text{max}} \) to 60 was sufficient to reproduce all fine structure present in the data.

In the standard approach to XPD-SSC analysis, calculations for a wide range of molecular orientations are performed and compared to experiment, until best agreement is found. In the present case of two coexisting molecular orientations, this is computationally not feasible, and we thus developed an alternative approach based on rotations in the space of multipole expansion coefficients, as outlined below.

We start by considering the general situation where more than one (inequivalent) molecular orientation must be considered, i.e. coexisting molecular orientations must be included in the analysis. We consider a case with \( n_{\text{Orient}} \) coexisting molecular orientations. Each orientation contributes with a weight \( w_i \) to the total pattern, thus the pattern from all coexisting orientations is obtained by incoherent summation:

\[
I^{SSC}(\theta, \varphi) = \sum_{i=1}^{n_{\text{Orient}}} w_i \cdot I_i^{SSC}(\theta, \varphi)
\]

(7)

with

\[
w_1 + w_2 + \ldots + w_{n_{\text{Orient}}} = 1
\]

(8)

Instead of doing full-featured SSC calculations for all molecular orientations, only a single SSC calculation \( I^{4\pi SSC} \) is performed for an isolated, single molecule in a particular “standard” molecular orientation, but over the full \( 4\pi \) hemisphere of emission angles. Simulated diffraction patterns for arbitrarily oriented molecules can now be obtained from this “standard” full \( 4\pi \) SSC calculation by simply rotating \( I^{4\pi SSC} \) by the appropriate Euler angles \( \alpha \beta \gamma \). The assumption here is that the molecular conformation is determined by intramolecular interactions and not by molecule-substrate interactions, i.e. that the molecular skeleton does not significantly relax when it is facing the substrate under slightly different orientations. This (implicit) assumption has previously been used successfully for the related cases of \( C_{60} \) and corannulene adsorbed on the same Cu(110) substrate, and is expected to be valid for hemifullerene as well.

To further save computation time, the rotation of the computed full \( 4\pi \) SSC pattern can also be done entirely in the space of multipole coefficients \( a_{lm}^{4\pi SSC} \) obtained from the multipole expansion of \( I^{4\pi SSC} \):

\[
I^{4\pi SSC}(\theta, \varphi) = \sum_{l,m} a_{lm}^{4\pi SSC} \cdot Y_{lm}(\theta, \varphi)
\]

(9)
Rotation of $I^{4\text{piS}}$ by the Euler angles $\alpha\beta\gamma$ (rotation operation $R^{\alpha\beta\gamma}$) gives the rotated diffraction pattern $I^{\text{rotS}}$:

$$I^{4\text{piS}}(\theta, \varphi) = \sum_{l,m} a^{4\text{piS}}_{lm} \cdot Y_{lm}(\theta, \varphi) \xrightarrow{R^{\alpha\beta\gamma}} I^{\text{rotS}}(\theta, \varphi) = \sum_{l,m} a^{\text{rotS}}_{lm} \cdot Y_{lm}(\theta, \varphi)$$

(10)

with new multipole coefficients $a^{\text{rotS}}_{lm}$ that are obtained from the original coefficients $a^{4\text{piS}}_{lm}$ via spherical harmonics rotation:

$$a^{\text{rotS}}_{lm} = Z_\gamma Y_\beta Z_\alpha a^{4\text{piS}}_{lm}$$

(11)

where $Z_\alpha$ is a rotation about the z-axis, $Y_\beta$ a rotation about the y-axis, and $Z_\gamma$ a rotation about z again.

To further simplify calculation of the rotated multipole coefficients, the rotation by the Euler angles $\alpha\beta\gamma$ can also be expressed by a combination of rotations around the z-axis and $\pm 90^\circ$ rotations around the x-axis, which is computationally very efficient:

$$a^{\text{rotS}}_{lm} = Z_\gamma X_{-90} Z_\beta X_{90} Z_\alpha a^{4\text{piS}}_{lm}$$

(12)

In the present case of two coexisting molecular orientations $\alpha_1\beta_1\gamma_1$ and $\alpha_2\beta_2\gamma_2$ of hemifullerene on Cu(110), with relative weights of $w_1$ and $w_2$, we can thus easily obtain the multipole coefficients $a^{\text{SSC}}_{lm}$ of the corresponding diffraction pattern from the ones of the hemifullerene in standard orientation (3-fold rotational axis perpendicular to the surface, bowl-opening facing away from the substrate, see Supplementary Figure 2) $a^{4\text{piS}}_{lm}$:

$$a^{\text{SSC}}_{lm}(w_1, \alpha_1, \beta_1, \gamma_1, w_2, \alpha_2, \beta_2, \gamma_2) = w_1 \cdot Z_\gamma X_{-90} Z_\beta X_{90} Z_\alpha a^{4\text{piS}}_{lm} + w_2 \cdot Z_\gamma X_{-90} Z_\beta X_{90} Z_\alpha a^{4\text{piS}}_{lm}$$

(13)

For comparison to experiment, the presence of equal amounts of M- and P-hemifullerene enantiomers as well as the 2-fold rotational symmetry of the substrate surface are taken into account by applying mirror symmetry and 2-fold rotational symmetry to the diffraction pattern (see Supplementary Figures 2 and 3), which can again be done directly on the multipole coefficients.

To avoid being trapped in local minima, minimization of the $R$ factor (eq. 6) was performed with a differential evolution algorithm as implemented in the Genetic Curvefitting extension "GenCurveFit XOP" to the IGOR Pro software. Multiple starting guesses were used to ensure identification of the global best fit.

The resulting best-fit SSC calculation is shown in Supplementary Figure 1b. There is excellent agreement with the experimental data (Supplementary Figures 1a, 3d,e), as also confirmed by the significantly improved $R$ factor of 0.22 compared to values between 0.25 and 0.37 for the cases where only a single orientation is taken into account (Supplementary Figure 3). The two best-fit orientations are sketched in Supplementary Figure 1c-f. One third of the hemifullerene molecules take an orientation with their 3-fold symmetry axis tilted by $10^\circ$ away from the surface normal along the [1\overline{1}2] direction.
This tilt brings the 6-6 bond between the central C6 ring and an adjoining C6 ring closest to the substrate surface (highlighted in red in 1c), and results in different heights above the surface for the three outermost C6 rings. This height difference amounts to 1.1 Å, and for the M-enantiomer of hemifullerene defines a clockwise sequence from highest (1) to middle (2) to lowest (2) C6 rings in a top view such as the one given in Supplementary Figure 1c (anti-clockwise for the P-enantiomer). From comparison of this configuration and its minority appearance (~1/3) with the STM results, we attribute it to the hemifullerene adsorbed on Cu(110) terraces. The majority species (~2/3) exhibits a significantly larger tilt of 18° away from the high-symmetry configuration, as illustrated in Supplementary Figure 1e,f. Its 3-fold symmetry axis is inclined by 18° along the [11̅0] direction (indicated by dashed black arrow in 1e), which brings the 5-6 bond between the central C6 ring and the adjoining C5 ring closest to the surface (highlighted in red in 1e). For this majority configuration, the sequence of highest (1) to middle (2) to lowest (2) C6 ring is anti-clockwise for M-hemifullerene, and with a significantly larger height difference of 1.9 Å. It clearly corresponds to the hemifullerenes observed to decorate step edges in STM images.

A comparison between the best-fit molecular orientations of M-hemifullerene at the step edge as determined from the XPD-SSC analysis and the minimum energy configuration from the extensive simulated annealing molecular dynamics DFT calculations is shown in Supplementary Figure 6. Despite the complexity of the system under investigation, with many degrees of freedom, the agreement between the two results is excellent. From both approaches, we find that the M-hemifullerene faces the Cu substrate with a 5-6 bond, with almost identical values for the tilt angle of its 3-fold symmetry axis (experiment: 18°; calculation: 20°), identical tilt directions (tilting around the 5-6 bond) and azimuthal orientations (3.5° difference between experiment and calculation).

We note that the XPD measurements were performed at room temperature where the molecules on terraces were too mobile to be imaged by STM. The difference in temperature between XPD and STM experiments should, however, have no influence on the validity of the method. According to the transition state theory of diffusion, molecular diffusion on a solid substrate proceeds with the molecules going over a barrier between two identical, energetically most favourable binding configurations. The residence time in the transition state - and only there a different configuration than the one determined by XPD can be expected - will be negligible compared to the residence time in the stable binding sites. Therefore, XPD collects photoelectrons essentially only from molecules residing in the stable adsorption sites, with the corresponding results thus being equally valid for the low temperature situation where diffusion is inhibited.
2) Additional data

Supplementary Figure 1 | XPD analysis of molecular orientations. (a) C1s XPD pattern acquired with the sample held at room temperature. (b) Simulated XPD pattern from single-scattering cluster (SSC) calculations accurately reproducing the experimental pattern. R factor analysis discloses two different adsorption configurations ("on-terrace" and "at-step-edge"), both demonstrating that the molecular C3 axis is significantly inclined away from the surface normal. The best-fit molecular ratio of hemifullerene adopting the on-terrace and at-step-edge configurations is about 1:2, in good agreement with STM observations. (c,d) On-terrace adsorption configuration of M-hemifullerene on Cu(110) according to the SSC calculations. The tilt of the M-enantiomer by 10° along the [1 1 0] direction (dashed black arrow) brings the 6-6 bond highlighted in red closest to the surface, and results in a clockwise sequence from highest (1) to middle (2) to lowest (3) C6 rings in a top view, as indicated by the red dashed arrow. (e,f) At-step-edge adsorption configuration of M-hemifullerene on Cu(110). The tilt of the M-enantiomer by 18° along the [1 1 0] direction (dashed black arrow) brings the 5-6 bond highlighted in red closest to the surface, and results in a counterclockwise intensity decrease sequence of the three outmost C6 rings.
Supplementary Figure 2 | Photoelectron diffraction from surface-adsorbed hemifullerene. (a) Illustration of the carbon skeleton of a \( M \)-hemifullerene molecule with its 3-fold symmetry axis perpendicular to the substrate surface, with red arrows highlighting the C-C bond directions producing the dominant forward focusing maxima in the C 1s photoelectron diffraction pattern. The carbon atoms are color coded according to their distance from the viewer, with darker grey tones corresponding to closer distances. (b) Simulated XPD pattern (SSC calculation) for a single \( M \)-hemifullerene oriented as shown in (a). Red circles highlight the three prominent intensity maxima due to forward scattering along the directions indicated by red arrows in (a). (c) SSC calculation taking into account both \( M \)- and \( P \)-hemifullerene enantiomers as well as the 2-fold rotational symmetry of the substrate surface.
Supplementary Figure 3 | SSC calculations for various hemifullerene orientations. (a-d) SSC calculations for different configurations. The left column gives a sketch of the corresponding molecular orientation(s). The middle and right columns show the resulting SSC calculations for the (artificial) case of enantiopure $M$-hemifullerene with a single azimuthal orientation (middle) and for the realistic
case with both $M$- and $P$-enantiomers (mirror symmetry) as well as 2-fold rotational symmetry due to the Cu(110) substrate (right). The numbers at the bottom right of the SSC patterns give the $R$ factor $R_{MP}$ (equation 6) quantifying the agreement between the SSC calculation and the experimental XPD pattern. (e) Experimental C 1s XPD pattern (right), and comparison of polar cuts (left) and azimuthal cuts (middle) through its most prominent maxima with the corresponding cuts from the best-fit SSC calculation shown in (d). Black dots: experimental data; red line: SSC calculation.

Supplementary Figure 4 | Enantioselective step decoration of 2D Cu islands and Cu adatom nanowires. Red, green and blue dots indicate the hemifullerene’s outer C6 rings with highest, middle and lowest apparent heights, respectively. A counter-clockwise height decrease of the three C6 rings identifies an $M$-enantiomer, whereas a clockwise height decrease is assigned to the $P$-enantiomer. (a)-(c) Steps and wires running parallel to the $[\overline{3}3\overline{4}]$ direction are decorated with $M$-enantiomers, those running parallel to the $[\overline{3}3\overline{4}]$ direction are decorated with $P$-enantiomers (T = 300 K, U = −2.0 V; I = 23 pA for image a, U = −2.4 V; I = 35 pA for images b,c). (d) DFT-based STM simulation of a $M$-hemifullerene stabilized Cu adatom nanowire running along $[\overline{3}3\overline{4}]$. The sequence of highest, to middle, to lowest protrusion in STM appearance of a $M$-hemifullerene is indicated by the coloured dots, and is in excellent agreement with experimental observations.
**Supplementary Figure 5** | **Definition of R- and S-kinks.** The sequence of facets from (100) via (110) to (111) at the kink is either clockwise (R-kink, a) or counter clockwise (S-kink, b).

**Supplementary Figure 6** | **Comparison of molecular orientation at the kinked step edge as obtained from DFT and XPD.** (a) Illustration of the minimum energy adsorption configuration of $M$-hemifullerene on Cu(110) as obtained from the DFT calculations. The 3-fold axis of the molecule is tilted by 20° along the [1 $\bar{1}$ 0] direction which brings the 5-6 bond highlighted in red closest to the surface. The carbon atoms are color coded according to their distance from the viewer, with darker grey tones corresponding to closer distances. (b) Comparison of the molecular orientation of $M$-hemifullerene in the minimum energy DFT configuration (left) with the one of the majority species obtained from the XPD-SSC analysis (right). A direct superposition of the two is shown at the bottom.
Supplementary Figure 7 | Optimized configuration of $M$-hemifullerene at the $S$-kink. Top (a), front (b) and side (c) views of $M$-hemifullerene bound to an $S$-kink as obtained by DFT calculations. The bonds are identified via charge density distribution calculations (d-f). Charge depletion is marked in red, charge accumulation in blue with a contour value of 0.06 e/Å$^3$. 
Supplementary Figure 8 | Optimized configuration of M-hemifullerene at the step edge along the (110) direction. The optimal configuration involves one $\eta^1$- and two $\eta^2$- coordinative bonds to the lower terrace and two $\eta^1$- coordinative bonds to adjacent step edge atoms.

Supplementary Figure 9 | C-Cu bond length analysis for M-hemifullerene at the R-kink. (a) Perspective view (about 10° off a top view) showing all C-Cu bonds, highlighted in green ($\eta^1$ bonds) and blue ($\eta^2$ bonds). The bonds are labelled with a number on the corresponding C atom (bond ID). Bond
lengths as obtained from the DFT calculation are indicated. (b) Plot of the C-Cu bond lengths, with the average of 2.19 Å and the spread of ±0.08 Å indicated by dashed lines.

3) References


8. IGOR Pro, WaveMetrics Inc., Lake Oswego, USA.