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PATTERNED NANOFIBER ARRAYS ASSEMBLED THROUGH PATTERNED FILTRATION

Abstract

An array of discrete nanofiber films that are physically separated from one another are described. Techniques for forming the nanofiber film array are also described. Techniques for forming these structures include placing a suspension of nanofibers and/or nanoparticles on a patterned substrate. A pressure differential is applied, drawing the solvent of the suspension through holes in a mask. The nanofibers collect on an impermeable layer on the mask in a pattern corresponding to the negative features (grooves, holes, trenches) of the mask as the solvent is flowed through the holes.

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Background/Summary

RELATED APPLICATIONS [0001] This application is a Divisional of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 17/726,819, filed on Apr. 22, 2022, which is a bypass continuation of PCT/US2020/049866, filed Sep. 9, 2020, which claims priority under 35 USC § 119(e) to U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 62/925,519 entitled “PATTERNED NANOFIBER ARRAYS,” filed on Oct. 24, 2019, and U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 62/962,532 entitled “PATTERNED NANOFIBER ARRAYS ASSEMBLED THROUGH PATTERNED FILTRATION,” filed on Jan. 17, 2020, which are each incorporated by reference herein in its entirety.

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0002] The present disclosure relates generally to nanofibers. Specifically, the present disclosure relates to techniques for forming patterned nanofiber arrays.

BACKGROUND

[0003] Nanofibers are known to have unusual mechanical, optical, and electronic properties. However, devising configurations of nanofibers that can be integrated into commercial products has been challenging because of the nanoscale dimensions of the nanofibers. One example of an advance in developing commercially useful embodiments of nanofibers is the fabrication of a nanofiber “forest.” This forest is an array of parallel nanofibers grown perpendicular to a substrate surface. The forest can be drawn from the substrate into a nanofiber sheet, in which the nanofibers are parallel to one another within the plane of the sheet. Nanofiber sheets can then optionally be formed into nanofiber yarns.

SUMMARY

[0004] In a first example, a method for forming a plurality of discrete nanofiber films on a substrate includes providing a filter assembly having a mask and a porous layer opposite the mask, the filter assembly including a membrane adjacent the mask, the mask defining a plurality of holes, placing a nanofiber suspension comprising nanofibers suspended in a solvent on the membrane of the filter assembly, applying a pressure differential to the filter assembly, the pressure differential flowing the solvent through holes of the plurality of holes in the mask, and responsive to flowing the solvent through the holes, forming nanofiber structures on the membrane at locations corresponding to the holes of the plurality of holes. The membrane can be permeable to the solvent and not permeable to the nanofibers suspended in the solvent. The plurality of holes may form a regular pattern of geometric shapes and the nanofiber structures can comprise discrete nanofiber films, the nanofiber films each comprising a plurality of nanofibers randomly oriented relative to each other in a plane of the nanofiber film. The nanofiber film can include conductive nanoparticles, and the method can include removing the nanofiber structures from the membrane and placing the nanofiber structures on a second substrate.

[0005] In a second example, a method for forming a plurality of discrete conductive structures on a nanofiber substrate includes providing a filter assembly having a mask and a porous layer opposite the mask, the mask defining a plurality of holes, placing a nanofiber substrate over the mask, placing a suspension of conductive nanoparticles in a solvent in fluid communication with the nanofiber substrate, applying a pressure differential to the filter assembly, the pressure differential forcing the solvent through holes of the plurality of holes in the mask, and forming conductive structures on the nanofiber substrate in a pattern corresponding to the holes of the plurality of

holes. The nanofiber substrate can be a filtered nanofiber film comprising a plurality of nanofibers randomly oriented relative to each other in a plane of the filtered nanofiber film. The nanofiber substrate can be a drawn nanofiber sheet comprising a plurality of nanofibers aligned end to end in a plane of the drawn nanofiber sheet. The conductive nanoparticles can comprise silver (Ag) nanowires. The plurality of holes can form a regular pattern of geometric shapes, and the conductive structures may be in the regular pattern of geometric shapes corresponding to the plurality of holes. The method can include removing the nanofiber substrate by immersing the filter assembly and the nanofiber substrate thereon into water and may further include placing the nanofiber substrate and the conductive structures thereon onto a final substrate.

[0006] In another example a nanofiber structure comprises a plurality of nanofiber films on a substrate, the nanofiber films comprising a plurality of nanofibers randomly oriented relative to each other in a plane of the films. The nanofiber films can be homogeneous or heterogeneous, can be discrete and separated from one another and/or may form a regular array of films. At least one of the nanofiber films of the plurality can be a geometric shape.

[0007] In another example, a composite structure includes a nanofiber substrate, and a plurality of conductive structures in an array on the nanofiber substrate. The nanofiber substrate can be a drawn nanofiber sheet comprising a plurality of nanofibers aligned end to end in a plane of the drawn nanofiber sheet. It can be a filtered nanofiber film comprising a plurality of nanofibers randomly oriented relative to each other in a plane of the filtered nanofiber film. The array can be a regular pattern of geometric shapes.

[0008] In another example, a method includes assembling a filter stack comprising a porous layer and a mask on the porous layer, the mask including a pattern of holes and/or negative features below a surface level of the mask, securing the porous layer, applying a pressure differential to the filter stack, the pressure differential resulting in higher pressure above the stack than below it, placing a suspension of a solvent and one or more of nanofibers and conductive nanoparticles on the filter stack, responsive to the applied pressure differential, causing the solvent to flow through holes in the mask, and filtering out an array of one or more of nanofibers and conductive nanoparticles, the array forming a layer or layers that correspond to the pattern of holes and/or negative features in the mask. The method can include placing a nanofiber sheet or a nanofiber film over the mask, and placing the suspension in contact with the nanofiber sheet or the nanofiber film, wherein the one or more of nanofibers and conductive nanoparticles form into the pattern of holes and/or negative features on the nanofiber sheet. The pressure differential can be applied by reducing the pressure below the filter stack in relation to the pressure above the filter stack or by increasing the pressure above the filter stack in relation to the pressure below the filter stack.

[0009] Another example is a method comprising flowing a fluid component of a suspension of nanofibers through a membrane, a mask and a porous layer to separate the fluid component from nanofibers, forming nanofiber films by distributing the nanofibers on the membrane in a pattern corresponding to a pattern of holes in the mask, and separating the nanofiber films from the membrane.

[0010] Another example is a method of forming conductive structures on a nanofiber membrane, the method comprising flowing a fluid component of a suspension of conductive nanoparticles through a nanofiber membrane, a mask and a porous layer, and separating conductive nanoparticles from the fluid component to form a pattern of conductive structures on the nanofiber membrane. The fluid component can be flowed through the structure in the order of membrane, mask and then then porous layer.

Description

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0011] FIG. 1 is a photomicrograph of an example forest of nanofibers on a substrate, in an embodiment.

[0012] FIG. 2 is a schematic illustration of an example reactor for nanofiber growth, in an embodiment.

[0013] FIG. 3 is an illustration of a nanofiber sheet that identifies relative dimensions of the sheet and schematically illustrates nanofibers within the sheet aligned end-to-end in a plane parallel to a surface of the sheet, in an embodiment.

[0014] FIG. 4 is an SEM photomicrograph is an image of a nanofiber sheet being laterally drawn from a nanofiber forest, the nanofibers aligning from end-to-end as schematically, in an embodiment.

[0015] FIG. 5 is a schematic illustration of a portion of a filtered nanotube film that includes larger and longer multiwall carbon nanofibers intermixed with single wall and/or few wall carbon nanotubes, all of which are randomly oriented within a plane of the film, in an embodiment.

[0016] FIG. 6 is a cross-sectional side view of an example patterned nanofiber array and a processing structure on which the patterned array is formed, in an embodiment

[0017] FIGS. 7A, 7C, 7D, and 7F illustrate plan views of various masks, each of while includes a different pattern of holes that can be used to form corresponding nanofiber arrays, in embodiments.

[0018] FIGS. 7B, 7E, and 7G illustrate plan views of nanofiber arrays formed by using corresponding masks illustrated in FIGS. 7A, 7C, 7D, and 7F, in embodiments.

[0019] FIG. 8 is a cross-sectional side view of an example patterned array of one or more of nanofibers and/or conductive nanoparticles formed on a nanofiber film that is in turn on a surface of a filter assembly, in an embodiment.

[0020] FIG. 9 illustrates a nanofiber substrate on which is disposed an array of conductive structures, in an embodiment.

[0021] The figures depict various embodiments of the present disclosure for purposes of illustration only. Numerous variations, configurations, and other embodiments will be apparent from the following detailed discussion. Furthermore, as will be appreciated, the figures are not necessarily drawn to scale or intended to limit the described embodiments to the specific configurations shown. For instance, while some figures generally indicate straight lines, right angles, and smooth surfaces, an actual implementation of the disclosed techniques may have less than perfect straight lines and right angles, and some features may have surface topography or otherwise be non-smooth, given real-world limitations of fabrication processes. In short, the figures are provided merely to show example structures.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Overview

[0022] Nanofibers often have unusual and interesting properties that are not present in similarly composed bulk materials. However, because of the nanoscopic dimensions of individual nanofibers, some nanofiber-based materials can be challenging to work with. For example, carbon nanofiber sheets, while possessing many interesting properties, are physically delicate and can be torn, folded, or otherwise damaged during processing by even the most subtle forces. Air flows in a laboratory caused by air handling equipment or the breath of an operator can sometimes damage a nanofiber sheet. Because of this physically delicate nature, some development efforts are focused not only on exploring and applying the unusual properties of nanofiber materials, but also on improving the processing of these materials.

[0023] Techniques described herein include liquid-phase methods for the formation of a plurality of discrete nanofiber structures separated from one another (equivalently referred to as an “array”) on a substrate. Examples of nanofiber structures include filtered films in which individual nanofibers are randomly oriented relative to one another within a plane of the film. Techniques described

herein can also include liquid-phase methods for the formation of an array of other structures (e.g., silver nanowire dots or strips) on nanofiber films.

[0024] Prior to descriptions of these arrays and the methods for producing the arrays, descriptions of nanofibers, nanofiber filtered films, and nanofiber forests and sheets follows.

Nanofiber Forests

[0025] As used herein, the term “nanofiber” means a fiber having a diameter less than 1 μ m. While the embodiments herein are primarily described as fabricated from carbon nanotubes, it will be appreciated that other carbon allotropes, whether graphene, micron or nano-scale graphite fibers and/or plates, and even other compositions of nano-scale fibers such as boron nitride may be processed using the techniques described below. As used herein, the terms “nanofiber” and “nanotube” are used interchangeably and encompass both single wall nanotubes, few wall nanotubes and/or multiwall nanotubes in which atoms are linked together to form a cylindrical structure. In some embodiments, multiwall nanotubes as referenced herein have between 6 and 20 walls. As used herein, a “nanofiber sheet” or simply “sheet” refers to a sheet of nanofibers aligned via a drawing process (as described in PCT Publication No. WO 2007/015710, and incorporated by reference herein in its entirety) so that a longitudinal axis of a nanofiber of the sheet is parallel to a major surface of the sheet, rather than perpendicular to the major surface of the sheet (i.e., in the as-deposited form of the sheet, often referred to as a “forest”). This is illustrated and shown in FIGS. 3 and 4, respectively.

[0026] The dimensions of nanotubes can vary greatly depending on production methods used. For example, the diameter of a carbon nanotube may be from 0.4 nm to 100 nm and its length may range from 10 μ m to greater than 55.5 cm. Carbon nanotubes are also capable of having very high aspect ratios (ratio of length to diameter) with some as high as 132,000,000:1 or more. Given the wide range of dimensional possibilities, the properties of carbon nanotubes are highly adjustable, or “tunable.” While many intriguing properties of carbon nanotubes have been identified, harnessing the properties of carbon nanotubes in practical applications requires scalable and controllable production methods that allow the features of the carbon nanotubes to be maintained or enhanced.

[0027] Due to their unique structure, nanotubes possess particular mechanical, electrical, chemical, thermal and optical properties that make them well-suited for certain applications. In particular, carbon nanotubes exhibit superior electrical conductivity, high mechanical strength, good thermal stability and are also hydrophobic. In addition to these properties, carbon nanotubes may also exhibit useful optical properties. For example, carbon nanotubes may be used in light-emitting diodes (LEDs) and photo-detectors to emit or detect light at narrowly selected wavelengths. Carbon nanotubes may also prove useful for photon transport and/or phonon transport.

[0028] In accordance with various embodiments of the subject disclosure, nanofibers (including but not limited to carbon nanotubes) can be arranged in various configurations, including in a configuration referred to herein as a “forest.” As used herein, a “forest” of nanofibers or carbon nanotubes refers to an array of nanofibers having approximately equivalent dimensions that are arranged substantially parallel to one another on a substrate. FIG. 1 shows an example forest of nanofibers on a substrate. The substrate may be any shape but in some embodiments the substrate has a planar surface on which the forest is assembled. As can be seen in FIG. 1, the nanofibers in the forest may be approximately equal in height and/or diameter.

[0029] Nanofiber forests as disclosed herein may be relatively dense. Specifically, the disclosed nanofiber forests may have a density of at least 1 billion nanofibers/cm.^{sup.2}. In some specific embodiments, a nanofiber forest as described herein may have a density of between 10 billion/cm.^{sup.2} and 30 billion/cm.^{sup.2}. In other examples, the nanofiber forest as described herein may have a density in the range of 90 billion nanofibers/cm.^{sup.2}. The forest may include areas of high density or low density and specific areas may be void of nanofibers. The nanofibers within a forest may also exhibit inter-fiber connectivity. For example, neighboring nanofibers within a nanofiber forest may be attracted to one another by van der Waals forces. Regardless, a

density of nanofibers within a forest can be increased by applying techniques described herein.

[0030] Methods of fabricating a nanofiber forest are described in, for example, PCT No.

WO2007/015710, which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

[0031] Various methods can be used to produce nanofiber precursor forests. For example, in some embodiments, nanofibers may be grown in a high-temperature furnace, schematically illustrated in FIG. 2. In some embodiments, catalyst may be deposited on a substrate, placed in a reactor and then may be exposed to a fuel compound that is supplied to the reactor. Substrates can withstand temperatures of greater than 800° C. or even 1000° C. and may be inert materials. The substrate may comprise stainless steel or aluminum disposed on an underlying silicon (Si) wafer, although other ceramic substrates may be used in place of the Si wafer (e.g., alumina, zirconia, SiO₂, glass ceramics). In examples where the nanofibers of the precursor forest are carbon nanotubes, carbon-based compounds, such as acetylene may be used as fuel compounds. After being introduced to the reactor, the fuel compound(s) may then begin to accumulate on the catalyst and may assemble by growing upward from the substrate to form a forest of nanofibers. The reactor also may include a gas inlet where fuel compound(s) and carrier gasses may be supplied to the reactor and a gas outlet where expended fuel compounds and carrier gases may be released from the reactor. Examples of carrier gases include hydrogen, argon, and helium. These gases, in particular hydrogen, may also be introduced to the reactor to facilitate growth of the nanofiber forest. Additionally, dopants to be incorporated in the nanofibers may be added to the gas stream.

[0032] In a process used to fabricate a multilayered nanofiber forest, one nanofiber forest is formed on a substrate followed by the growth of a second nanofiber forest in contact with the first nanofiber forest. Multi-layered nanofiber forests can be formed by numerous suitable methods, such as by forming a first nanofiber forest on the substrate, depositing catalyst on the first nanofiber forest and then introducing additional fuel compound to the reactor to encourage growth of a second nanofiber forest from the catalyst positioned on the first nanofiber forest. Depending on the growth methodology applied, the type of catalyst, and the location of the catalyst, the second nanofiber layer may either grow on top of the first nanofiber layer or, after refreshing the catalyst, for example with hydrogen gas, grow directly on the substrate thus growing under the first nanofiber layer. Regardless, the second nanofiber forest can be aligned approximately end-to-end with the nanofibers of the first nanofiber forest although there is a readily detectable interface between the first and second forest. Multi-layered nanofiber forests may include any number of forests. For example, a multi-layered precursor forest may include two, three, four, five or more forests.

Nanofiber Sheets

[0033] In addition to arrangement in a forest configuration, the nanofibers of the present application may also be arranged in a sheet configuration. As used herein, the term “nanofiber sheet,” “nanotube sheet,” or simply “sheet” refers to an arrangement of nanofibers where the nanofibers are aligned end to end in a plane. An illustration of an example nanofiber sheet is shown in FIG. 3 with labels of the dimensions. In some embodiments, the sheet has a length and/or width that is more than 100 times greater than the thickness of the sheet. In some embodiments, the length, width or both, are more than 10³, 10⁶ or 10⁹ times greater than the average thickness of the sheet. A nanofiber sheet can have a thickness of, for example, between approximately 5 nm and 30 μm and any length and width that are suitable for the intended application. In some embodiments, a nanofiber sheet may have a length of between 1 cm and 10 meters and a width between 1 cm and 1 meter. These lengths are provided merely for illustration. The length and width of a nanofiber sheet are constrained by the configuration of the manufacturing equipment and not by the physical or chemical properties of any of the nanotubes, forest, or nanofiber sheet. For example, continuous processes can produce sheets of any length. These sheets can be wound onto a roll as they are produced.

[0034] As can be seen in FIG. 3, the axis in which the nanofibers are aligned end-to end is referred

to as the direction of nanofiber alignment. In some embodiments, the direction of nanofiber alignment may be continuous throughout an entire nanofiber sheet. Nanofibers are not necessarily perfectly parallel to each other and it is understood that the direction of nanofiber alignment is an average or general measure of the direction of alignment of the nanofibers.

[0035] Nanofiber sheets may be assembled using any type of suitable process capable of producing the sheet. In some example embodiments, nanofiber sheets may be drawn from a nanofiber forest. An example of a nanofiber sheet being drawn from a nanofiber forest is shown in FIG. 4

[0036] As can be seen in FIG. 4, the nanofibers may be drawn laterally from the forest and then align end-to-end to form a nanofiber sheet. In embodiments where a nanofiber sheet is drawn from a nanofiber forest, the dimensions of the forest may be controlled to form a nanofiber sheet having particular dimensions. For example, the width of the nanofiber sheet may be approximately equal to the width of the nanofiber forest from which the sheet was drawn. Additionally, the length of the sheet can be controlled, for example, by concluding the draw process when the desired sheet length has been achieved.

[0037] Nanofiber sheets have many properties that can be exploited for various applications. For example, nanofiber sheets may have tunable opacity, high mechanical strength and flexibility, thermal and electrical conductivity, and may also exhibit hydrophobicity. Given the high degree of alignment of the nanofibers within a sheet, a nanofiber sheet may be extremely thin. In some examples, a nanofiber sheet is on the order of approximately 10 nm thick (as measured within normal measurement tolerances), rendering it nearly two-dimensional. In other examples, the thickness of a nanofiber sheet can be as high as 200 nm or 300 nm. As such, nanofiber sheets may add minimal additional thickness to a component.

[0038] As with nanofiber forests, the nanofibers in a nanofibers sheet may be functionalized by a treatment agent by adding chemical groups or elements to a surface of the nanofibers of the sheet and that provide a different chemical activity than the nanofibers alone. Functionalization of a nanofiber sheet can be performed on previously functionalized nanofibers or can be performed on previously unfunctionalized nanofibers. Functionalization can be performed using any of the techniques described herein including, but not limited to CVD, and various doping techniques.

[0039] Nanofiber sheets, as drawn from a nanofiber forest, may also have high purity, wherein more than 90%, more than 95% or more than 99% of the weight percent of the nanofiber sheet is attributable to nanofibers, in some instances. Similarly, the nanofiber sheet may comprise more than 90%, more than 95%, more than 99% or more than 99.9% by weight of carbon.

Filtered Nanofiber Films

[0040] Another planar form of assembled nanofibers is a “filtered film” in which one or more of multiwall nanotubes, few wall nanotubes, and/or single wall nanotubes are dispersed in a solvent (i.e., with the majority of nanotubes suspended individually and not adsorbed onto other nanotubes) for subsequent formation into a sheet of randomly oriented carbon nanotubes. This ability of individual nanotubes to be uniformly dispersed in a solvent can in turn produce a dimensionally uniform (i.e., uniform thickness) nanotube film formed by removing the solvent from the suspended nanofibers. This physical uniformity (further improved by stacking multiple filtered films on one another) can also improve the uniformity of the properties across the film (e.g., transparency to radiation).

[0041] For the purposes of clarity, multiwall nanotubes are considered to have from 4 to 20 concentric walls and a diameter of from 4 nm to 100 nm, few wall nanotubes are considered to have two or three concentric walls and a diameter of from 2 nm to 6 nm, and single wall carbon nanotubes are considered to have 1 wall and a tube diameter of from 0.2 nm to 4 nm.

[0042] Each of these three different types of nanotubes can have different properties. In one example, few wall carbon nanotubes and single wall carbon nanotubes can be more conveniently dispersed in a solvent (i.e., with the majority of nanotubes suspended individually and not adsorbed onto other nanotubes) for subsequent formation into a sheet of randomly oriented carbon

nanotubes. This ability of individual nanotubes to be uniformly dispersed in a solvent can in turn produce a dimensionally uniform nanotube filtered film formed by removing the solvent from the suspended nanofibers. The strength of van der Waals attraction between nanofibers also differs between single/few wall nanofibers and multiwall nanofibers. Generally, single/few wall nanofibers have a greater van der Waals attraction to each other than that observed for multiwall nanofibers. This increased attraction between single/few wall nanofibers can improve the ability of few/single wall carbon nanotubes to adhere to one another to form a coherent nanofiber structure, such as a filtered film. The sheets or films formed from single wall carbon nanotubes and few wall carbon nanotubes are able to conform to a topography of an underlying surface at smaller dimensions than sheets or films formed from multiwall carbon nanotubes. In some examples, sheets or films formed from single wall carbon nanotubes and/or few wall carbon nanotubes can conform to a topography of an underlying substrate as small as 10 nm, which is at least 50% smaller than the feature size a multiwall carbon nanotube film can conform to. In some cases, the multiwall carbon nanotubes are more likely than single/few wall nanotubes to agglomerate together and thereby produce a structurally non-uniform film that is less likely to conform and/or adhere to an underlying surface. [0043] Preparation of a filtered film can begin by preparing a dry mixture of the desired proportion of one or more of multiwall nanotubes, few wall nanotubes, and/or single wall nanotubes. This mixture of one or more of the different types of nanotubes can be then suspended in a solvent. In another example, separate suspensions of known concentrations of nanotubes in a solvent are prepared. For example, separate suspensions of multiwalled carbon nanotubes, few wall carbon nanotubes, and single wall nanotubes can be prepared. The suspensions can then be mixed in a desired proportion to arrive at the desired relative proportions of the multiwall, and few/single wall nanotubes in the combined suspension and ultimately the final filtered film.

[0044] In some examples the solvent used to prepare nanotube suspensions can include water, isopropyl alcohol (IPA), N-Methyl-2-pyrrolidone (NMP), dimethyl sulfide (DMS), and combinations thereof. In some examples a surfactant can also be included to aid the uniform dispersion of carbon nanofibers in the solvent. Example surfactants include, but are not limited to, sodium cholate, sodium dodecyl sulfate (SDS), and sodium dodecyl benzene sulphonate (SDBS). Weight percentage of surfactant in the solvent can be any effective concentration, for example between 0.1 weight % to 10 wt. % of solvent. In one set of embodiments, a mixture of multiwalled carbon nanotubes and few/single wall carbon nanotubes can be prepared and suspended in water and SDS surfactant. The ratio of multiwalled to single (or few) walled carbon nanotubes by weight can vary from 100% multiwalled to 100% single walled, including 0% multiwalled, 20% multiwalled, 40% multiwalled, 60% multiwalled or 80% multiwalled, and all ratios therebetween. Mixing and suspension of the nanotubes in the solvent can include mechanical mixing (e.g., using a magnetic stir bar and stirring plate), ultrasonic agitation (e.g., using an immersion ultrasonic probe) or other means.

[0045] As described above, examples described herein include nanofiber films that can be formed from one type of nanofiber (e.g., single wall, few wall, multiwall) or a combination of these different types of nanofibers. Examples that are composed of more than one type of nanofiber can be described as “composite films” due to the combination or mixture of different nanofiber types. In some examples herein, a multiwalled carbon nanotube can have a median length of approximately 300 μm (+/-10%). As will be appreciated in light of the following description, multiwalled carbon nanotubes having a length of at least 250 μm or longer can be included in a filtered film to improve the mechanical stability of filtered films that also include single wall and/or few wall carbon nanotubes, which generally are shorter (e.g. from 0.5 μm to 30 μm). Films that are formed exclusively from either the longer multiwalled nanotubes or shorter few/single wall carbon nanotubes are generally not as durable (i.e., resistant to mechanical failure such as cracking or disintegrating) as those that include a mixture of the multiwall and few/single wall nanotubes.

[0046] FIG. 5 is a schematic illustration of a composite nanotube filtered film 500, in an example

of the present disclosure. As shown, the composite nanotube filtered film **500** includes single/few wall nanotubes **504** that are inter-dispersed with multiwall carbon nanotubes **508**. In this example film **500**, the single/few wall carbon nanotubes **504** can have at least two beneficial effects on the structure of the film **500** as a whole. For example, the single/few wall carbon nanotubes **508** can increase the number of indirect connections between proximate multiwalled carbon nanotubes **508** by bridging the gaps between proximate multiwalled carbon nanotubes **504**. The interconnections between the short and long nanofibers can improve the transfer and distribution of forces applied to the film and thus improve durability. In a second example of a beneficial effect, the single/few wall carbon nanotubes **504** can decrease a median and/or mean size of the gaps between adjacent and/or overlapping multiwall carbon nanotubes **508**, which can be advantageous for some embodiments. Furthermore, too many longer multiwalled carbon nanotubes can, when dispersed in a solvent, agglomerate. This can result in a non-uniform film. Shorter nanotubes are more easily dispersed in a solvent and thus are more likely to form a dimensionally uniform film having a uniform density of nanotubes per unit volume or area.

Properties of Nanofiber Filtered Films

[0047] Filtered films, particularly those made with single and/or few wall carbon nanotubes also generally have greater transparency to some wavelengths of radiation. In some examples, transmittance of incident radiation can be as high as 90% or 97% at 550 nm. In some cases, this transmittance is significantly higher than drawn sheets of multiwall carbon nanotubes (such as those drawn from a carbon nanotube forest, described below). While not wishing to be bound by theory, it is believed that the aligned orientation of nanotubes in a drawn sheet increases scattering of the radiation relative to a filtered film. In part, the greater transparency of filtered films (with their randomly oriented nanotubes) has prompted interest in forming transparent filters and pellicles from filtered carbon nanotube films in a variety of applications.

[0048] Despite the advantages of single wall carbon nanotubes and few wall carbon nanotubes described above, multiwall carbon nanotubes also have advantages not necessarily observed to the same degree in nanotube structures formed from single or few wall nanotubes. For examples, structures formed from multiwall carbon nanotubes are generally observed to have greater emissivity than those formed from few/single wall carbon nanotubes. While not wishing to be bound by theory, it is believed that the greater number of walls and greater diameter of multiwall carbon nanotubes are factors in the increased emissivity. For example, multiwall carbon nanotube structures (e.g., the nanotube forest, a nanotube sheet) have a greater thermal emissivity than nanotube structures formed from few/single wall nanotubes. In one comparative example, an emissivity of a nanofiber structure comprising multiwall carbon nanotubes is on the order of 0.275 (+/-15%) whereas a nanofiber structure comprising single wall carbon nanotubes can have a significantly lower emissivity of 0.05 (+/-15%). High emissivity can be particularly advantageous in technological applications in which processes can cause heating within the nanofiber structure, and mechanisms of conductive or convective cooling of the nanofiber structure are limited or not technically feasible.

[0049] Nanofiber structures having transparency to certain wavelengths of radiation (e.g., extreme ultraviolet or “EUV” in the range of 10 nm to 124 nm) have promise for use as a filter (also referred to as a “pellicle”) in EUV lithography devices. The pellicle can act as a particle filter that prevents foreign particles from landing on a surface of the material being patterned and/or from landing on a surface of the lithography mask being used to pattern a photoactive surface. This reduces the rate of lithographically introduced defects, thus improving manufacturing yields of the patterned devices.

[0050] Despite the high transparency in the EUV radiation wavelength range, challenges remain in adopting nanofiber EUV pellicles. For example, cooling a nanofiber pellicle may be important for preventing overheating of the pellicle due to absorption of EUV energy during lithographic patterning. Elevated temperatures in the pellicle can degrade nanofiber structure integrity, and the

opportunities for convective and/or conductive cooling of the nanofiber structure in this environment are low given that EUV lithography is performed in a vacuum and the pellicle is mostly suspended (with peripheral edges being attached to a frame). For this reason, thermal emission is the preferred mechanism of cooling of a nanofiber pellicle used for EUV applications. [0051] While multiwall carbon nanotube structures generally have a higher emissivity, which would address the problem of cooling in EUV pellicle, multiwall carbon nanotubes when aligned in a drawn sheet also are less transmissive than randomly oriented single/few wall carbon nanofibers in a filtered film. The more transparent (but less emissive) few wall/single wall nanofiber films are often too mechanically delicate to be used as a pellicle. In some cases, because of their relative short lengths (e.g., less than 100 μm), films and sheets made from few wall/single wall nanofibers are fragile and can disintegrate when subjected to pressure cycles (e.g., changes in pressure of ± 1 atmosphere to 2 atmospheres (from atmospheric pressure to vacuum)) commonly used in EUV lithography machines.

Patterned Nanofiber Arrays

[0052] While the preceding configurations of nanofibers have generally a planar, continuous configuration (whether a sheet or forest), embodiments described below can use the solvent-based techniques described above to form a patterned array of discrete nanofiber filtered films (in any of a variety of shapes and patterns) on a substrate. For example, a pattern of discrete circular, square, linear, columnar, or other nanofiber filtered films separated from one another can be formed on a substrate. In some examples, the resulting array is electrically conductive, and/or transparent to extreme UV radiation, infrared radiation, or other wavelengths of radiation in the optical spectrum. This patterned array of nanofiber structures can be transferred to another substrate if desired.

[0053] FIG. 6 illustrates a cross-sectional view of one embodiment of a patterned nanofiber array **600** and a processing structure **604** on which the patterned array is formed. The patterned nanofiber array **600** in this cross-sectional view includes nanofiber film disks **602A** and **602B**. The processing structure **604** includes a filter assembly **606** and a suction fitting **608**.

[0054] At a high level, techniques for forming the patterned nanofiber array **600** begin by the placement of the filter assembly **606** on the suction fitting **608** as shown in FIG. 6. A pressure differential can then be applied across membrane **624** with pressure being greater on the upper side than the down side. For example, negative pressure can then be applied to the filter assembly **606** via a vacuum pump or other similar device, via the suction fitting **608**. A suspension of nanofibers (including one or more types of nanofibers as described above) can be applied to an exposed surface of the filter assembly **606**. The negative pressure applied to the surface of the filter assembly **606** opposite the applied nanofiber suspension can draw the suspension toward holes in one layer of the filter assembly. Because the solvent is able to pass through the various layers of the filter assembly, but the nanofibers are not, the nanofibers remain on the exposed surface of the filter assembly **606** in a pattern. A more detailed description of the process and the various elements shown in FIG. 6 follows.

[0055] The filter assembly **606** includes a support frame **612**, a porous layer **616**, a mask **620**, and a membrane **624**.

[0056] The porous layer **616** is comprised of one or more porous materials (i.e., materials that allow the passage of fluids) that can be held in contact with one side of the mask **620** and between the mask **620** and a source of negative pressure (e.g., a vacuum pump). The porous and gas/fluid permeable nature of the porous layer **616** helps to provide a more even distribution of negative pressure across an entire area of the mask **620**. Examples of porous and/or gas/fluid permeable materials that can be used to form the porous layer **616** include but are not limited to woven fabrics (e.g., nylon woven fabric, acrylic woven fabrics, synthetic fiber woven fabrics, natural fiber woven fabrics,) non-woven fabrics (felts, wool, cotton), extruded fabrics and permeable barrier layers (e.g., PTFE such as GORETEX®), sintered glass, sintered stainless steel, and glass frit, among others.

[0057] The support frame **612** is used to hold the porous layer **616** in contact with the mask **620** and prevent the porous layer **616** from being separated from the filter assembly **606** during application of negative pressure. If the porous layer is of sufficient rigidity it can serve the purpose of both the porous layer and the support frame.

[0058] The mask **620** can be disposed between the porous layer **616** and the membrane **624** and on a side of the porous layer **616** opposite that from the source of negative pressure. The mask **620** includes a pattern of negative spaces **622** (e.g., holes) that corresponds to the pattern into which the array **600** of nanofiber films is to be formed. It is through this pattern of holes **622**, intermediated by the porous layer **616**, that negative pressure is applied to the suspension of nanofibers on the exposed surface of the filter assembly **606**. The mask **620** can be made of a polymer film in which the pattern of holes **622** has been formed. The mask **620** can also be formed from glass or a fabric, either of which can be processed to include holes **622**. Other materials that can be used for the mask **620** will be appreciated in light of the present disclosure.

[0059] The membrane **624** is a filtration structure that permits the solvent (used to suspend the nanofibers) to be drawn through to the holes **622** in the mask **620** in response to the negative pressure applied via the suction fitting **608**. The nanofibers, unable to permeate the membrane **624**, collect on the surface of the membrane **624** at locations corresponding to the underlying holes **622** and thus form in an array of discrete nanofiber filtered films corresponding to the pattern of holes **622** in the mask **620**. Examples of materials that can be used for the membrane **624** include, but are not limited to, nitrocellulose, cellulose (i.e., filter paper), polytetrafluorethylene (PTFE), nylon, or any other material generally used as a filtration membrane or filter paper.

[0060] The suction fitting **608** can be any structure (e.g., a funnel) that can form a seal with a perimeter of the filter assembly **606** or a portion of the filter assembly **606**. This seal enables negative pressure applied through the suction fitting **608** to an underside of the filter assembly **606** to draw solvent through the filter assembly **606**. As described above, this causes an array of filtered nanofiber films **600** to form on the exposed surface of the filter assembly **606**. In some examples, the applied negative pressure is -1 atmosphere (atm) or between -0.1 atm at -1.0 atm.

[0061] The suspension of nanofibers may be agitated during the process to assure even distribution of nanofibers of different sizes or properties. In other cases, the suspension may be allowed to settle in order to partially separate nanofibers of different sizes or properties. For instance, denser or larger multiwalled nanofibers may congregate closer to the bottom of the suspension while single wall or less dense nanofibers remain in a uniform suspension. Taking advantage of this separation, in a single process a layer of primarily multiwalled nanotubes can be deposited first, followed by a layer of primarily few or single walled nanotubes, resulting in a heterogeneous layer.

[0062] FIGS. 7A-7G illustrate various plan views of example masks and corresponding nanofiber arrays that can be produced using techniques described herein. FIG. 7A illustrates a mask **704** with a variety of circular, elliptical, and rectangular holes **708** therein. This illustrates that in some examples, the mask **704** can include any of a variety of hole shapes including regular polygons, irregular polygons, and any of a variety of other shapes. FIG. 7B illustrates a corresponding pattern of filtered nanofiber films **712**. FIG. 7C illustrates a mask **716** that has a plurality of parallel, elongate rectangular holes, each having a width β and a separation distance between adjacent sides of α (as shown in magnified inset FIG. 7D). The values of α and β can be anywhere between a few microns to hundreds of centimeters. In some examples, the values of α and β can be such that the corresponding pattern **724** of filtered nanofiber films (having the same ($\pm 5\%$) spacing and width as in the mask **716**) can be used as a diffraction grating for extreme UV radiation, infrared radiation, or radiation in the optical spectrum. FIGS. 7F and 7G illustrate a mask **728** with a pattern of circular holes **732** in an array that forms corresponding nanofiber film array **736**.

[0063] In any of the preceding examples, each structure of the array can have an average thickness of from 0.02 microns to 100 microns (depending on the concentration of nanofibers in the solvent and the amount of suspension that is flowed through the mask **620**).

[0064] Once formed, the array of nanofiber films (e.g., as illustrated by examples, **712**, **724**, **736**), can be placed onto another (final) substrate. Examples of a final substrate include, but are not limited to, a nanofiber sheet, a graphene sheet, a polymer sheet, a polymer sheet coated with an adhesive layer, a silicon wafer, a glass substrate (e.g., silicate glass), among others. In some examples, the array of nanofiber films can be removed from the membrane **624** by immersion of the membrane **624** into water. Because the nanofiber films are hydrophobic, they will generally be lifted from the membrane **624** upon immersion. The final substrate can then be contacted to the floating array so to adhere to the array and remove the array from the water. In other examples, the array of nanofiber films can be placed directly onto a final substrate by simply placing the final substrate in direct contact with the expose surface of the nanofiber sheets of the array. Depending on the relative attraction/adhesion between the final substrate and the sheets of the array, the sheets of the array may stick to the final substrate and be removed from the membrane **624**. In yet other embodiments, a soluble membrane may be used and can be removed (dissolved) from the nanofiber films by applying an appropriate solvent.

Conductive Array on a Nanofiber Filtered Film

[0065] FIG. **8** illustrates an alternative configuration for preparing embodiments in which an array of discrete nanofiber/nanoparticle/microparticle regions can be formed in a pattern and/or array on top of a filtered nanofiber film (or alternatively a nanofiber sheet drawn from a nanofiber forest). The processing structure **804** depicted in FIG. **8** includes a filter assembly **806** and a suction fixture **808**. The filter assembly **806** includes a support frame **812**, a porous layer **816**, a filtration membrane **820**, and a patterned non-permeable layer **824**.

[0066] A nanofiber sheet and/or a nanofiber filtered film **830** is disposed on the patterned nonpermeable layer **824**. The nanofiber sheet and/or filtered film **830** corresponds to embodiments described above and thus requires no further description.

[0067] The support frame **812**, the porous layer **816** and the suction fixture **808** are all the same or similar to those described above in the context of FIG. **6**. These elements thus require no further description.

[0068] The filtration membrane **820** can be formed from a material, such as a fabric, that helps to smooth out any patterns that may be produced by the rigid support frame **812**. It can be similar to porous layer **616** described above.

[0069] The patterned nonpermeable layer **824** is fabricated to include holes **822** (of any shape and in any pattern) so that negative pressure applied through the suction fixture **808** can draw solvent from a nanofiber or nanoparticle suspension through various elements of the filter stack **806** thereby leaving a corresponding pattern of nanofibers/nanoparticles/microparticles **802A**, **802B** on an exposed surface of the nanofiber film/nanofiber sheet **830**. The pattern of holes **822** can be formed in the patterned nonpermeable layer **824** by etching (e.g., photolithographically, laser), or mechanical processing (e.g., blades, milling).

[0070] In some examples, patterned nonpermeable layer **824** can be formed from sheets of graphene oxide, polymers, glass (e.g., borosilicate glass), silicon wafer, among others.

[0071] Unlike the example presented above in the context of FIG. **6**, a filtered nanofiber film **830** (or nanofiber sheet drawn from a nanofiber forest) is placed on the filter stack **806**. A suspension of nanofiber or of conductive nanoparticles (or both) can then be placed on top of the nanofiber film **830**. When a pressure differential is applied to the filter stack, the solvent is drawn through the filter stack via holes **822**. The result is an array **800** of nanofiber/nanoparticle/microparticle films **802A**, **802B** on the exposed surface of the nanofiber film **830** in a pattern that corresponds to the pattern of holes and other negative features in the patterned nonpermeable layer **824**. These patterns can be in any shape or distribution, such as those previously described in the context of FIGS. **7A-7G**. In some examples, the suspension can be of conductive nanoparticles, such as silver (Ag) nanowires. Regardless of the composition, the array **800** can be referred to generically as an array **800** of conductive structures **802**.

[0072] The limitations on the strength of the negative pressure are similar to those described in the context of FIG. 6.

[0073] In this example, and in FIG. 6, positive pressure can be applied to a surface on which the suspension has been applied (opposite that of the suction filter) so as to push the solvent through the filter stack.

[0074] In some examples, the nanofiber film **830** with the pattern of nanofibers and/or nanoparticles **802A**, **802B** on the surface can be removed from the filter stack **806** by immersion in deionized water. Because the nanofiber film **830** is hydrophobic, this layer will naturally lift from the filter stack **806** to float on a surface of the water. A frame can then be used to lift the film from the surface of the water, thus depositing the filtered film on the frame. If needed, the surface tension of the water (or other solvent) can be modified by adding surfactants or other solvents. This configuration of an array of conductive structures **802A**, **802B** on the nanofiber film **830** on a frame (or other substrate) **834** is shown in FIG. 9. The composite film can then be dried (e.g., using a low humidity environment, heat, vacuum). This process can be repeated to form a stack films of, optionally, differently composed mixtures of multiwall, few wall, and/or single wall nanotubes as well as non-carbon materials such as metal particles.

[0075] This example process can be repeated multiple times to produce multiple films of carbon nanotubes and/or multiple patterns of nanofiber arrays. In some examples, individual films (having the same or different proportions of multiwall and few/single walled carbon nanotubes in each film) are stacked on one another to form a multilayer composite film. Stacking two or more films can produce a more uniform stack with more uniform properties. For example, if one film in the stack has a local defect (e.g., a hole or tear), adjacent films in the stack can provide physical continuity and uniformity of the properties that would otherwise be absent at the location of the defect. In some embodiments, a stack can include anywhere from 2 to 10 individual films, each of which can have a same or different composition (that is, a different relative proportion of multiwall to single/few wall carbon nanotubes) from other films in the stack.

Further Considerations

[0076] The foregoing description of the embodiments of the disclosure has been presented for the purpose of illustration; it is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the claims to the precise forms disclosed. Persons skilled in the relevant art can appreciate that many modifications and variations are possible in light of the above disclosure.

[0077] The language used in the specification has been principally selected for readability and instructional purposes, and it may not have been selected to delineate or circumscribe the inventive subject matter. It is therefore intended that the scope of the disclosure be limited not by this detailed description, but rather by any claims that issue on an application based hereon. Accordingly, the disclosure of the embodiments is intended to be illustrative, but not limiting, of the scope of the invention, which is set forth in the following claims.

Claims

1. A method for forming at least one patterned nanofiber film disk on a first substrate, the method comprising: providing a filter assembly comprising the first substrate, a porous layer, and a mask, wherein the first substrate is permeable to a solvent and non-permeable to nanofibers; the mask has a plurality of patterned holes and is disposed between the first substrate and the porous layer; and the porous layer is permeable to both the solvent and the nanofibers, placing a nanofiber suspension comprising the nanofibers suspended in the solvent on the first substrate of the filter assembly; applying a pressure differential across the filter assembly with higher pressure above the first substrate to direct a flow of the nanofiber suspension through the mask; and forming the at least one patterned nanofiber film disk on the first substrate corresponding to the plurality of patterned holes of the mask.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the plurality of patterned holes forms a pattern of a selected geometric shape.
 3. The method of claim 1, wherein the nanofibers included in the at least one patterned nanofiber film disk are arranged in a planar orientation of the first substrate and randomly oriented relative to each other.
 4. The method of claim 1, wherein the at least one patterned nanofiber film disk comprises conductive nanoparticles.
 5. The method of claim 1, further comprising: removing the at least one patterned nanofiber film disk from the first substrate and placing the at least one patterned nanofiber film disk on a second substrate.
 6. The method of claim 1, wherein the first substrate is a nanofiber sheet, a drawn nanofiber sheet, a nanofiber filtered film, or a combination thereof.
 7. The method of claim 1, wherein the filter assembly further comprises a filtration membrane disposed between the mask and the porous layer.
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