

A water-soluble Manganese complex for selective electrocatalytic CO₂ reduction to CO

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Supporting Information Placeholder

ABSTRACT: Relatively few solution electrocatalysts for CO₂ reduction in aqueous solutions are reported. However to be sustainable, electrocatalytic CO₂ reduction is likely to be coupled to water oxidation in a complete device. Here we report a water soluble Mn polypyridyl complex for the electrocatalytic reduction of CO₂ to CO. This complex shows activity across a broad pH range and an excellent selectivity at pH 9 (3.8:1, CO:H₂). Cyclic voltammetry indicates activity across a range of different electrode materials (Boron doped diamond, glassy carbon and Hg/Au amalgams).

INTRODUCTION

Rising atmospheric CO₂ levels are a critical challenge facing society. An attractive option is to electrocatalytically¹ or photocatalytically² reduce CO₂ to fuels or feedstocks. The direct electrocatalytic one-electron reduction of CO₂ is thermodynamically challenging; however, the energy required is considerably reduced by directing catalysis *via* proton-coupled reduction pathways (e.g. CO₂ + 2e⁻ + 2H⁺ → CO + H₂O, $E^0 = -0.73$ V *vs.* Ag/AgCl at pH 7).³ A serious complication is the competitive hydrogen evolution reaction which occurs at a similar potential (2H⁺ + 2e⁻ → H₂, $E^0 = -0.61$ V *vs.* Ag/AgCl at pH 7), making it necessary to develop catalysts with high levels of selectivity for CO₂ reduction.

Many homogeneous molecular catalysts which are selective for CO₂ reduction are known⁴ although catalysis is often reported in organic solvents such as acetonitrile (CH₃CN) or *N,N*-dimethylformamide (DMF) with an additional proton source added in a low concentration (typically 5%). However, to enable a practical electrolyser that reduces CO₂ using water as the electron source, the ability to operate in aqueous solutions is desired. The increased proton concentration in aqueous solvents accentuates the need for selectivity and relatively few water-soluble molecular electrocatalysts for selective CO₂ reduction are known. Some examples include an iron(III) tetraphenylporphyrin functionalised with trimethylammonium groups which reduces CO₂ selectively at pH 6.7;⁵ [Ni(cyclam)]²⁺^{6, 7} and its derivatives (where cyclam = 1,4,8,11-tetraazacyclotetradecane);^{8, 9, 10, 11} an Ir-pincer complex;¹² and, the recently reported [Re(4,4'-hydroxymethyl-2,2'-bipyridine)(CO)₃Br].¹³

Mn complexes of the form [Mn(bpy)(CO)₃Br] (where bpy = 2,2'-bipyridyl) were first reported to be active for CO₂ reduction to CO in CH₃CN/H₂O (95:5) in 2011.¹⁴ Since then numerous

studies of this class of electrocatalysts have been reported due to their ability to reduce CO₂ at moderate overpotentials and use of abundant elements.¹⁵⁻²⁰ Spectroelectrochemical studies²¹⁻²⁴ have shown that [Mn(bpy)(CO)₃Br] is not the active catalytic species, instead formation of the primary active catalyst occurs *via* a one-electron reduction and bromide ligand loss to yield the dimer 1/2[Mn₂(bpy)₂(CO)₆], followed by a subsequent one-electron reduction to yield the five co-ordinate active catalyst [Mn(bpy)(CO)₃]. For some derivatives (e.g. [Mn(bpy(Me)₂)(CO)₃Br], where (bpy(Me)₂) = 4,4'-dimethyl-2,2'-bipyridine), CO₂ reduction has also been reported to occur *via* direct addition of CO₂ and H⁺ to the initially formed dimeric species,²⁵ although in most cases the primary catalytically active species is instead [Mn(bpy)(CO)₃].

A common feature of the studies of these Mn catalysts in solution to date has been the use of organic solvents which, in addition to conferring solubility, can contribute to suppressing competitive H₂ evolution. However, there is increasing evidence of the highly selective nature of this class of complexes towards CO₂ reduction making their study in water of interest. In previous reports we^{26, 27} made use of the lack of aqueous solubility of [Mn(bpy)(CO)₃Br] to immobilise the complex within a Nafion film on a multi-wall carbon nanotube/glassy carbon (MWCNT/GC) electrode for heterogeneous CO₂ reduction in water. These first reports of heterogenized systems achieved relatively high current densities (> 4 mA cm⁻²), stable activity (turnover numbers (TON) > 470) and selectivities of up to ~2:1 CO:H₂; however, they also required relatively high overpotentials (typically η = 0.48 to 0.83 V) to operate. More recently, a pyrene-modified [Mn(bpy)(CO)₃Br] derivative was also immobilised on MWCNT and was reported to operate in water at η = 0.55 and TON_{CO} > 1000, with a mixture of H₂, CO and formate being produced depending on the catalyst surface loading.²⁸

Very recently a polymerised Mn complex also showed catalytic activity in water.²⁹ It is therefore important that this class of catalysts is further studied in aqueous electrolytes; however, to the best of our knowledge, the homogeneous electrocatalytic reduction of CO₂ in aqueous solvents has not been previously reported.

Here we report the electrocatalytic behaviour of [Mn^I(bpy(COOH)₂)(CO)₃Br] (where (bpy(COOH)₂) = 4,4'-dicarboxy-2,2'-bipyridine) in water. In a past study we attempted to modify the operating potential of this class of Mn carbonyl catalysts through modification of the bpy ligand in the 4,4' position.²⁷ Although the addition of electron withdrawing carboxylic acid groups did shift the first and second reduction potentials of the complex in CH₃CN positively with respect to the unmodified bpy complex, the catalytic activity in acetonitrile/water (95:5) electrolyte was modest when compared to the parent [Mn(bpy)(CO)₃Br]. However, here we show that the presence of the carboxylate groups imparts aqueous solubility, and in water [Mn^I(bpy(COOH)₂)(CO)₃Br] shows a high level of selectivity towards CO₂ reduction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

[Mn^I(bpy(COOH)₂)(CO)₃Br] is soluble to concentrations of *ca.* 0.5 mM (Figs. S1, S2) when dissolved in pure water, with a 0.5 mM solution having pH 3.5 in air. Using Britton-Robinson buffer at higher pH (9.7) the solubility is increased, and solutions up to 5 mM can be achieved (Figs. S1, S2). To explore the pH-dependent behavior of this complex, UV/Vis spectra of [Mn^I(bpy(COOH)₂)(CO)₃Br] between pH 1.5 – 12.5 have been recorded. At pH 3.5 the UV/Vis spectrum is typical of complexes of this type, with a MLCT absorption at 410 nm (blue-shifted relative to in CH₃CN, λ_{max} = 460 nm, Fig. S3), and a π-π* transition at 300 nm, Fig. 1(a, c). The large shift in MLCT maxima is primarily due to ligand exchange, Fig. S4. As shown below in aqueous solution the bromide is displaced by water.

Both the MLCT and the π-π* bands show a pH dependence at high (10-12.5) and low (1.5-3.5) pH values, Fig. 1. A titration in the mid-pH range showed no spectral changes. The spectral dependence at low pH values is assigned to the carboxylic acid groups on the bipyridine ligand, [Mn^I(bpy(COOH)₂)(CO)₃(OH₂)⁺ to 2H⁺ + [Mn^I(bpy(COO)₂)(CO)₃(OH₂)]. Previous studies on related Re and Ru complexes with carboxylic acid-modified bpy ligands have shown two distinct pK_a values, one for each carboxylic acid group on the bpy ligand. Our data can be adequately fitted to either a single pK_a (2.52 ± 0.8) or two close-lying pK_a values (2.60 ± 0.06, 2.25 ± 0.10) suggesting similar behavior.^{30, 31} The pK_a of 11.65 is attributed to deprotonation of the aquo complex, [Mn^I(bpy(COO)₂)(CO)₃(OH₂)⁺] that is formed following the displacement of Br⁻ in water. The formation of an aquo complex is confirmed through mass spectrometry (Fig. S5) and FTIR spectroscopy (Fig. S6). The measured pK_a is in-line with the analogous complexes [Re(bpy(CH₂OH)₂)(CO)₃(OH₂)⁺] and [Re(bpy)(CO)₃(OH₂)⁺].¹³ In this past study addition of CO₂ caused precipitation of [Re(bpy)(CO)₃(OC(O)OH)], whilst [Re(bpy(CH₂OH)₂)(CO)₃(OC(O)OH)]⁺ remained soluble in CO₂ saturated water. Here we find that [Mn^I(bpy(COO)₂)(CO)₃(OH₂)⁺] remains soluble under CO₂. The UV/Vis spectra in the presence and absence of CO₂ are very similar, both in water and carbonate electrolyte, therefore our

control experiment suggests that displacement of the aquo ligand by bicarbonate does not occur extensively and if formed the carbonato adduct is not the majority species, Fig. S7.

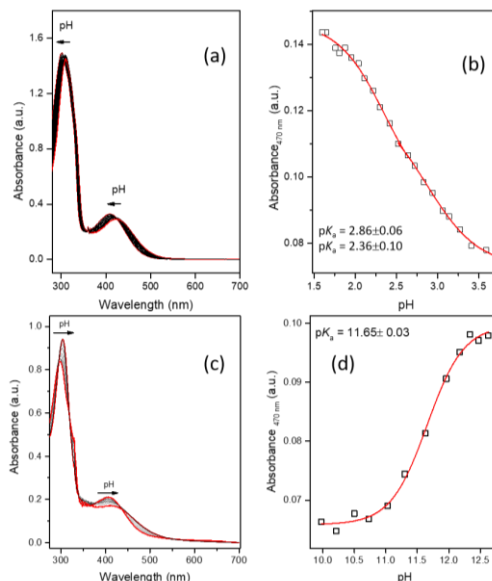


Fig. 1: UV/Vis spectra recorded following the preparation of solutions using [Mn^I(bpy)(COOH)₂)(CO)₃Br] 8.6 × 10⁻⁵ M in Britton-Robinson buffer between pH 1.5-3.5 (a) and 10-12.5 (c). pK_a values were obtained from a plot of the absorbance at 470 nm versus the pH of the solution (b), (d).

To enable the study of the electrochemical behavior of this complex across a wide pH range we have initially used a Hg/Au amalgam working electrode, Fig. 2. Amalgam electrodes have a wide potential window in aqueous electrolyte, permitting the study of redox processes at negative potentials and low pH that would be unobservable with more commonly employed electrode materials (e.g. glassy carbon).³² Between pH 11.5 and 4 the CVs of [Mn^I(bpy(COO)₂)(CO)₃(OH₂)⁺] show two irreversible reductions, at -1.04 (± 0.03) V and -1.35 (± 0.03) V whose positions are not strongly dependent upon the pH (accurate E_{red} at each pH are reported in Table S1), Fig. 2. UV/Vis spectroelectrochemical studies of [Mn^I(bpy(COOH)₂)(CO)₃Br] in DMF show that in aprotic solvents this complex behaves similarly to related complexes,^{27, 33} with the first reduction being assigned to the reduction of [Mn^I(bpy(COO)₂)(CO)₃(DMF)]⁺ which can undergo loss of the solvent ligand and dimerization. The dimer is then reduced in a 2 electron process to form 2 equivalents of [Mn⁰(bpy(COO)₂)(CO)₃]³⁻, Fig. S8, Table S2. Spectroelectrochemical experiments in aqueous solvents are more challenging as gas evolution, even under Ar due to H₂ production, from the most commonly used mesh electrodes can prevent accurate optical transmission measurements. However at relatively high pH's (9) we have been able to study the first reduction of [Mn^I(bpy(COO)₂)(CO)₃(OH₂)⁺] at a carbon foam electrode, Fig 3. The UV/Vis data is shown as a difference spectrum. New positive bands indicate the formation of new species. At potentials negative of the first reduction (-1.3 V versus an Ag wire pseudo reference electrode) bands at 393, 536, 641 and 824 nm are observed. UV/Vis maxima around 800 nm are commonly observed with a range of binuclear Mn diimine complexes.³⁴ With the exception of the band at 536 nm, there is good agreement with the UV/Vis spectrum of the dimer complex in DMF (380, 499, 644 and 810 nm, Table S2).

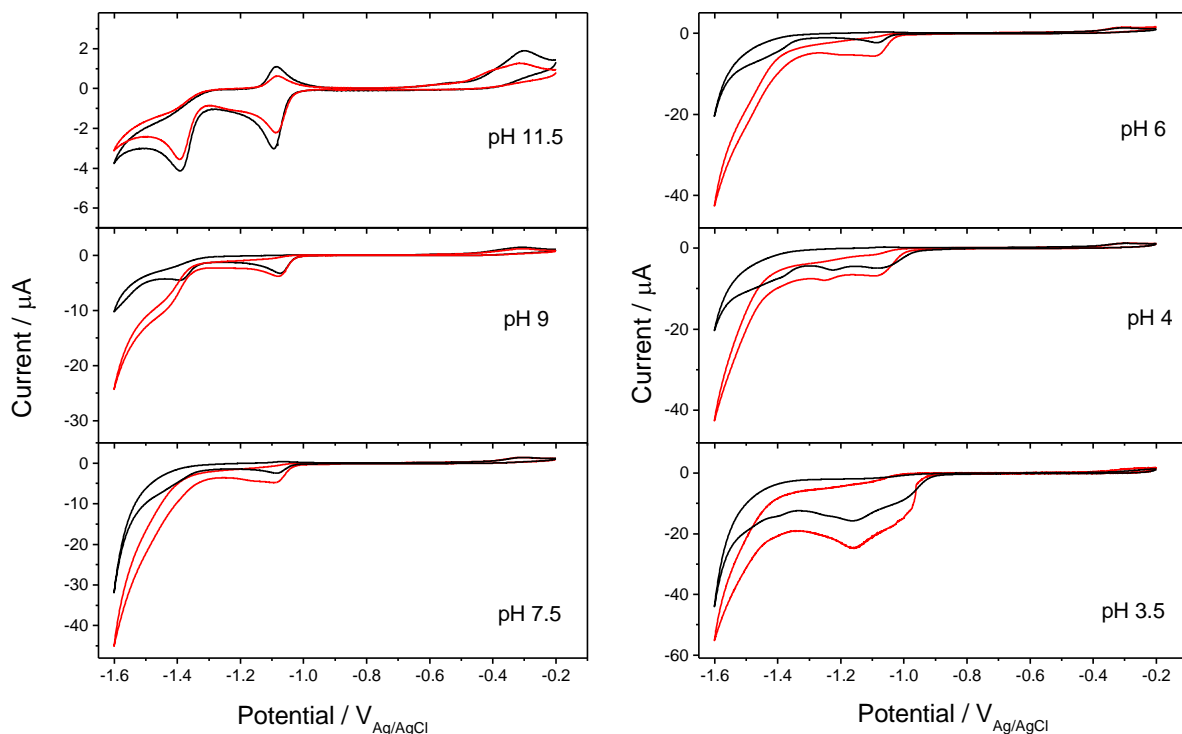


Fig. 2: CVs of $[\text{Mn}(\text{bpy})(\text{CO}_2\text{H})(\text{CO})_3(\text{OH}_2)]^+ / [\text{Mn}(\text{bpy})(\text{COO})_2(\text{CO})_3(\text{OH}_2)]^- / [\text{Mn}(\text{bpy})(\text{COO})_2(\text{CO})_3(\text{OH})]^{2-}$ (0.5 mM total concentration), under argon (black) and CO_2 (red), carried out at a scan rate of 100 mV s^{-1} , Hg/Au WE. The electrolyte was K_2CO_3 (0.5 M) + KCl (0.1 M) for pH 11.5-7.5, 0.1 M KCl for pH 3.5-6 as prepared, and adjusted to the desired value by adding aliquots of either HCl or KOH solutions.

Therefore we assign the first reduction to the formation of $[\text{Mn}(\text{bpy}(\text{COO})_2)(\text{CO})_3]^{2+}$ which we anticipate can be reduced at the 2nd reduction to form the active catalyst, $[\text{Mn}(\text{bpy}(\text{COO})_2)(\text{CO})_3]^{3-}$. The UV/Vis band in figure 3 in water at 536 nm is currently unassigned. It may also arise from the dimer complex with the difference to the DMF spectrum being due to solvatochromism, however it is also feasible that additional species are present at potentials close to the first reduction and future spectroelectrochemical studies will explore this interesting behavior.

At potentials negative of -1.40 V when the $\text{pH} \leq 7.5$ we observe a steep increase in current under argon suggesting that electrocatalytic hydrogen evolution can occur, Fig. 2. In-line with expectations the magnitude of the catalytic current for hydrogen evolution increases at lower pH values. At high pH (11.5) there is minimal evidence of H_2 evolution and the re-oxidation of $[\text{Mn}^0(\text{bpy}(\text{COO})_2)(\text{CO})_3]^{3-}$ to reform the dimer occurs at -1.09 V, Fig. 2. Further oxidation to reform the starting complex takes place at -0.30 V. Below pH 4 we find the reduction potential of $[\text{Mn}^I(\text{bpy}(\text{COO})_2)(\text{CO})_3(\text{OH}_2)]^-$ shifts positively (-0.95 V at pH 3.5, Fig. 2) and by pH 2.5, when $[\text{Mn}^I(\text{bpy}(\text{COOH})_2)(\text{CO})_3(\text{OH}_2)]^+$ is expected to be the dominant form, the first reduction is at -0.9 V. Below pH 2.5 accurate determination of the first reduction potential was not possible due to excessive H_2 formation at these potentials, even on Hg/Au. The positive shift in reduction potential upon protonation of the carboxylate groups can be rationalized through past DFT studies which have shown that the first reduction of $[\text{Mn}(\text{bpy})(\text{CO})_3\text{Br}]$ occurs *via* the reduction of the bipyridine ligand and similar behavior would be expected here.³⁵ In this case protonation of the carboxylic acid groups would stabilize

the reduced form of the complex more effectively than the negatively charged carboxylates. Indeed in acetonitrile/water (95:5) under CO_2 , where protonation of the carboxylate groups may occur (the pK_a of $\text{CO}_2 + \text{H}_2\text{O}$ in acetonitrile is 23.4),³⁶ the first reduction is at *ca.* 0.8 V, significantly positive (~ -0.25 V) of the reduction potential of the deprotonated $[\text{Mn}^I(\text{bpy}(\text{COO})_2)(\text{CO})_3(\text{CH}_3\text{CN})]^-$ under argon in aqueous solution.

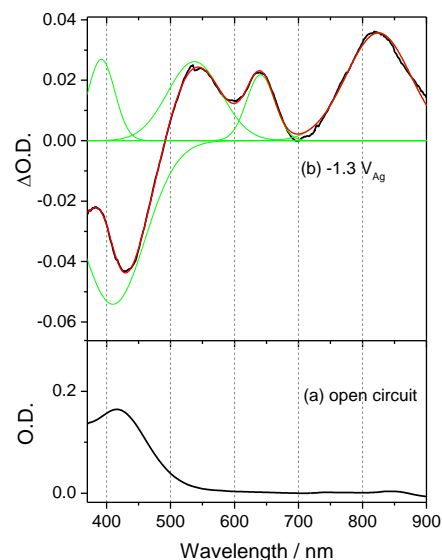


Fig. 3: (a) UV/Vis spectrum of $[\text{Mn}^I(\text{bpy}(\text{COO})_2)(\text{CO})_3(\text{OH}_2)]^-$ at pH 9 (b) UV/Vis difference spectrum following reduction at $-1.3 \text{ V}_{\text{Ag}}$ on a carbon foam electrode under an Argon atmosphere K_2CO_3 (0.5 M) + KCl (0.1 M) at pH = 9. Green lines show the individual Gaussian peaks of the overall multi-peak fit (red line).

An additional reduction between -1.15 and -1.25 V is also observed at $\text{pH} \leq 4$, Fig. 2. The reductive current increases steeply with decreasing pH (Fig. 5) and at pH 2.5 it reaches 90 μA at -1.21 V (1.8 mA cm^{-2} , Fig. S9) indicating the presence of a catalytic process, likely H_2 evolution, possibly *via* the dimer complex. It is clear that the electrochemistry of $[\text{Mn}^{\text{I}}(\text{bpy}(\text{COOH})_2)(\text{CO})_3(\text{OH}_2)]^+$ is significantly more complex than that of $[\text{Mn}^{\text{I}}(\text{bpy}(\text{COO})_2)(\text{CO})_3(\text{OH}_2)]^+$ in water and further studies will explore this interesting result. Instead here for the rest of the paper we focus on the electrochemical behavior of $[\text{Mn}^{\text{I}}(\text{bpy}(\text{COO})_2)(\text{CO})_3(\text{OH}_2)]^+$ in the presence of CO_2 .

At potentials negative of -1.40 V between pH 4-9 under CO_2 we measure a steep increase in current, which exceeds that observed under argon from H_2 evolution, indicating the presence of electrocatalytic CO_2 reduction. At pH 11.5 minimal CO_2 reduction occurs, in-line with past observations in aprotic solvents³⁷ that a suitably high concentration of Brønsted acid is required to facilitate the protonation of the initially bound CO_2 . Finally the complex shows similar behavior to what observed on amalgam electrodes on both glassy carbon (GC) and boron doped diamond (BDD) electrodes (Figs. 4, S10, S11), with a large increase in current under CO_2 , indicating that catalysis is not restricted to amalgam electrodes. A plot of current versus pH, from the CVs in Fig. 2, at -1.5 V (Fig. 5) shows that while there is a catalytic CO_2 current at pH 2.5-9, the contribution from proton reduction is minimized at pH 9, while CO_2 reduction is still occurring at an appreciable level, therefore selectivity is expected to be higher under these conditions.

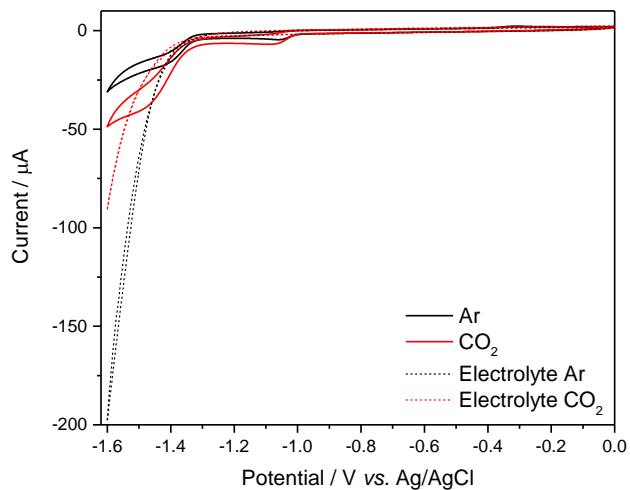


Fig. 4: CV of $[\text{Mn}(\text{bpy}(\text{COO})_2)(\text{CO})_3(\text{OH}_2)]^+$ 0.5 mM at pH 7 (0.1 M KCl, 0.5 M K_2CO_3) recorded at 100 mV s^{-1} on GCE under Ar and CO_2 .

Electrolysis experiments carried out at -1.4 V (pH 9) for 22 hours (Fig. S12) confirm that $[\text{Mn}^{\text{I}}(\text{bpy}(\text{COO})_2)(\text{CO})_3]^+$ is an active catalyst for CO_2 reduction in water achieving a bulk TON for CO of 57 (± 13), as measured by gas chromatography of the cell headspace over 3 independent experiments. Significantly a good selectivity for CO_2 reduction to CO in water was achieved with a Faradaic efficiency of 65 (± 15) % for CO production compared to 17 (± 5) % for H_2 . Tests for formate by ion chromatography revealed no trace of this product. CVs and UV/Vis spectra recorded post electrolysis showed only slight decomposition of the complex (Fig. S13 and S14) and this coupled to the continued activity over 22 hours indicates reasonable stability.

Control experiments carried out under argon in the presence of the catalyst and the $\text{K}_2\text{CO}_3/\text{KHCO}_3$ electrolyte (pH 9) showed only trace CO, indicating that the source of the carbon is dissolved CO_2 and experiments in the absence of the catalyst showed greatly reduced currents, Fig S15. It is apparent that this complex is one of only a very select group which is able to effectively reduce CO_2 in water.

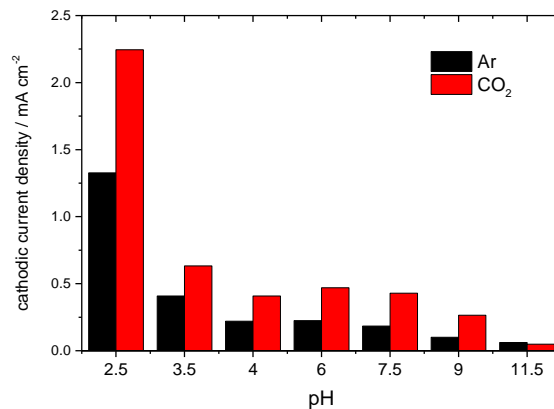


Fig. 5: Current at -1.5 V vs. pH under argon (black) and CO_2 (red) from the CV measurements presented in figure 2.

A small increase in current under CO_2 between -1.05 and -1.40 V with $[\text{Mn}^{\text{I}}(\text{bpy}(\text{COO})_2)(\text{CO})_3(\text{OH}_2)]^+$ at pH 9 is also observed. Bulk electrolysis at -1.2 V achieved a $\text{TON}_{\text{CO}} = 10$ in 22 hours, a $\text{CO}:\text{H}_2$ selectivity of *ca.* 4.5:1, and a total FE of 65 %. -1.20 V is approximately 0.2 V positive of the reduction potential of the dimer complex, suggesting that in water CO_2 reduction may also occur following the oxidative addition of CO_2 and H^+ to a Mn^{0} carbonyl dimer in the manner previously described by Bourrez and colleagues.²⁵ Significantly the observation of CO_2 reduction at -1.2 V corresponds to a very low overpotential, only 0.35 V, similar to that previously reported for a pyrene modified Mn carbonyl complex in water,²⁸ and amongst the lowest values reported for a water soluble CO_2 reduction electrocatalyst.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion we report a Mn polypyridyl complex for homogeneous electrocatalytic CO_2 reduction in aqueous electrolyte. Solubility is conferred by two carboxylic groups on the polypyridyl ligand and upon dissolution the Mn-Br undergoes ligand exchange to yield the aquo complex. Cyclic voltammetry of the complex shows electrocatalytic CO_2 reduction on both carbon and Hg/Au working electrodes. Bulk electrolysis shows that the catalyst is selective towards CO_2 reduction, achieving a 3.8:1 ($\text{CO}:\text{H}_2$) at -1.40 V in aqueous electrolyte. At pH values close to, or below, the pK_a of the carboxylic acid groups very large current increases are observed under argon and CO_2 and new reduction features appear. Future studies will explore the apparent changes in mechanism at low pH.

EXPERIMENTAL SECTION

Milli-Q water (18.2 M Ω) was used throughout. NaOH, KCl, KHCO_3 , K_2CO_3 and HCl, and were used as received (Fisher Scientific). Na_2CO_3 (anhydrous, Sigma-Aldrich), H_3PO_4 (85 %

wt., Aldrich), H_3BO_3 (> 99.8 %, Merck) and acetic acid (> 99.5 %, Sigma-Aldrich) were used as received. HCl (Fischer, 37 %, analytical reagent grade) was diluted appropriately before use. $[\text{Mn}^{\text{I}}(\text{bpy})(\text{COOH})_2(\text{CO})_3\text{Br}]$, was synthesized as described previously.²⁷

CVs were measured using a Palmsens³ potentiostat and a pear-shaped flask with a Hg/Au amalgam electrode (geometric surface area = 0.049 cm²), GC (Glassy carbon) electrode (BASi, geometric surface area = 0.0717 cm²) or a boron doped diamond (BDD) electrode (Windsor Scientific, geometric surface area = 0.0717 cm²) as the working electrodes. The amalgam was prepared as follows: a freshly polished gold disc electrode is immersed in mercury for 1-2 minutes, the excess mercury removed and the electrode was left to dry for at least two hours. A Pt coil or mesh were used as the counter electrode and Ag/AgCl (3 M NaCl) was used as the reference electrode (BASi). Experiments were purged with argon, nitrogen or CO₂ for 30 minutes prior to use. The pH was varied by adding HCl or KOH at various concentrations while keeping the purged solution under a blanket of the relevant gas to ensure a common value between Ar/N₂ and CO₂ experiments. Controlled potential electrolysis (CPE) used a Palmsens³ and a custom mercury pool cell (4.15 cm²) without stirring or gas bubbling. The counter electrode was separated in a second compartment by a Vycor® frit to minimize re-oxidation of products. The counter electrode compartment contained a 1 M NaOH aqueous solution with 0.1 M ferrocene carboxylic acid as a sacrificial reagent to avoid the formation of Cl₂ or O₂ at the counter electrode. Spectroelectrochemical measurements for the aqueous solutions were carried out in a quartz cuvette using a Palmsens³ potentiostat, a carbon foam working electrode, platinum mesh counter electrode and Ag/AgCl reference electrode. The Spectrometer beam was centered on the electrode. The potential was held at the indicated values until the resulting current reached a steady state, then a UV-vis spectrum was recorded. Spectroelectrochemical difference spectra were fitted to multiple Gaussian peaks with the peak maxima and peak width of the starting complex fixed at values derived from the fitting of the open-circuit spectrum. SEC in DMF were recorded at 1 mM complex in 0.1 M tetrabutylammonium perchlorate supporting electrolyte using an OTTL cell (University of Reading, WE, CE = Pt mesh; PRE = Ag wire).

Gas chromatography was performed using an Agilent 6890N employing N₆ helium as the carrier gas (5 ml.min⁻¹). A 5 Å molecular sieve column (ValcoPLOT, 30 m length, 0.53 mm ID) and a pulsed discharge detector (D-3-I-HP, Valco Vici) were employed. CO peak areas were quantified with multiple calibrant gas injections and were re-calibrated daily. FTIR spectroscopy using a Bruker Vertex spectrometer operating in transmittance mode. UV/Vis absorption data were obtained using a Shimadzu 2550 UV/Vis/NIR spectrophotometer in transmittance mode using either 10 or 2 mm pathlength quartz cuvette.

High-resolution mass spectra (HRMS) for verification of elemental composition were recorded on a Bruker Compact mass spectrometer. The system has a mass resolution of 30,000 (FSW @ 1222 m/z) and mass accuracy better than 1-2 ppm RMS error (depending on calibration mode). Agilent Tune Mix- L was used for calibration, control software: tofControl 4.1 and Data Analysis 4.4. Samples were infused via syringe pump at a rate of 150 µl/hr. ESI +/- experiments were recorded over the range 50-2000 m/z, end-plate offset 500V capillary 4500V, nebulizer 2.0 bar, dry gas 8.0 L/min, and dry temperature 180°C.

Variable pH UV/Vis spectra were recorded using Britton-Robinson buffers of various starting pH values.³⁸ pH values were measured using a VWR SympHony SP70P pH meter, which was calibrated before each use using pH 4, 7 and 10 standards. Concentration-dependent UV/Vis spectra were recorded as follows: accurately weighed solutions of complex were made up in a series of volumetric flasks covered in aluminum foil. Each flask was sonicated for 10 minutes to ensure complete dissolution of the complex or saturation of the solution had occurred. Aliquots of each solution were centrifuged at 10000 rpm for 5 minutes and the UV/Vis spectra of the supernatant measured.

ASSOCIATED CONTENT

Supporting Information

UV/Vis and FTIR spectroscopies, mass spectrometry, further cyclic voltammetry, bulk electrolysis data.

Raw experimental data for all figures is freely available from the University of Liverpool Research Data Catalogue at DOI: 10.17638/datacat.liverpool.ac.uk/497

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The authors declare no competing financial interests

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