

# Area-Selective Atomic Layer Deposition of Two-Dimensional WS<sub>2</sub> Nanolayers

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# Area-selective atomic layer deposition of 2D WS<sub>2</sub> nanolayers

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## Abstract

With downscaling of device dimensions, two dimensional (2D) semiconducting transition metal dichalcogenides (TMDs) such as WS<sub>2</sub> are being considered as promising materials for future applications in nanoelectronics. However, at these nanoscale regimes, incorporating TMD layers in the device architecture with precise control of critical features is challenging using current top-down processing techniques. In this contribution, we pioneer the combination of two key avenues in atomic-scale processing: area-selective atomic layer deposition (AS-ALD) and growth of 2D materials and demonstrate bottom-up processing of 2D WS<sub>2</sub> nanolayers. Area-selective deposition of WS<sub>2</sub> nanolayers is enabled using a *ABC-type* plasma-enhanced ALD process involving acetylacetone (Hacac) as inhibitor (A), bis(*tert*-butylimido)-bis(dimethylamido)-tungsten as precursor (B), and H<sub>2</sub>S plasma as the co-reactant (C) at a low deposition temperature of 250 °C. The developed AS-ALD process results in the immediate growth of WS<sub>2</sub> on SiO<sub>2</sub> while effectively blocking growth on Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> as confirmed by *in situ* spectroscopic ellipsometry and *ex situ* X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy measurements. As a proof of concept, the AS-ALD process is demonstrated on patterned Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/SiO<sub>2</sub> surfaces. The AS-ALD WS<sub>2</sub> films exhibited sharp Raman ( $E_{2g}^1$  and  $A_{1g}$ ) peaks on SiO<sub>2</sub>, a fingerprint of crystalline WS<sub>2</sub> layers, upon annealing at temperatures within the thermal budget of semiconductor back-end-of-line processing ( $\leq 450$  °C). Our AS-ALD process also allows selective growth on various TMDs and transition metal oxides while blocking growth on HfO<sub>2</sub> and TiO<sub>2</sub>. It is expected that this work will lay the foundation for area-selective ALD of other 2D materials.

The downscaling of dimensions in nanoelectronic devices has led to the exploration of alternate, two dimensional (2D) semiconductors for future nanodevice applications.<sup>1-6</sup> In this regard, semiconducting transition metal dichalcogenides (TMDs) such as WS<sub>2</sub> have attracted a lot of interest due to their high carrier mobility and direct bandgap in the monolayer regime.<sup>3,7</sup> In ultra-scaled nanoelectronic devices, it is crucial to precisely incorporate TMD layers at desired locations in the device architecture with consistent layer characteristics. Conventionally, lithography-based top-down processing techniques are used to pattern films into device features. Precise patterning and alignment of critical device features will become challenging using the current top-down processing schemes especially in sub-5 nm technology nodes.<sup>8-10</sup> At the same time, patterning 2D TMD layers with resist-based lithography risks inducing contaminants into the layers, that can significantly impact their functional characteristics.<sup>11-14</sup> In this regard, selective-growth of TMD layers on predetermined locations (also referred to as area-selective deposition) via bottom-up approaches has attracted significant interest from both academia and industry.<sup>14</sup> Rather than performing deposition, lithography and etching for each layer in a device stack, some of the layers can be incorporated in a bottom-up manner using this approach. By directly depositing TMD layers on pre-patterned surfaces, area-selective deposition can enable the integration of TMD layers in multilayer device stacks without the need for resist-based patterning of the delicate TMD layers. Therefore, this approach decreases the total number of lithography and etching steps in the fabrication of nanoelectronic devices, and thus, can enable cost-effective device fabrication schemes for future technology nodes.

Area-selective deposition of TMD layers has been sparingly reported in the literature. Flakes of MoS<sub>2</sub> have been deposited at pre-determined locations by using lithography patterned nucleation seeds or topological features in chemical vapour deposition (CVD) processes.<sup>15,16</sup> In these reported methods, the removal of seeds after fabrication is not straightforward.<sup>14,17</sup> The control over thickness and shape of the seeded TMD structures is also a point of concern.<sup>17</sup> Area-selective growth of CVD MoS<sub>2</sub> has also been enabled by enhancing the reactivity of pre-determined areas to CVD surface reactions through chemical treatments<sup>17</sup> and mechanically induced triboelectric effects.<sup>14</sup> The use of seed layers were mitigated in these processes. However, the longevity and stability of the enhanced surface reactivity of pre-determined areas is uncertain with these methods. Gallium ion beams have been used to control the density of surface hydroxyl groups on the initial substrate (SiO<sub>2</sub>) and achieve patterned growth of MoS<sub>2</sub> in a CVD process.<sup>18</sup> Recently, WS<sub>2</sub> was selectively deposited using pre-patterned a-Si sacrificial layers in a pulsed CVD process.<sup>19</sup> Conceivably, to date, area-selective growth of TMD layers has been restricted to CVD-based processes<sup>14-16</sup> that typically involve high temperature processing ( $\geq 700$  °C ). Moreover, these methods do not necessarily offer atomic level-thickness control over the TMD layer being deposited.

Recently, area-selective atomic layer deposition (AS-ALD) has attracted a lot of attention as a promising alternative pathway to realize selective growth of materials on pre-determined locations.<sup>20,21</sup> AS-ALD is an advanced atomic layer deposition (ALD) process that limits growth to pre-determined areas by taking advantage of the surface chemistry differences between the growth and non-growth areas.<sup>22,23</sup> The chemospecific characteristic of the process coupled with the atomic level accuracy of ALD is exploited to enable bottom-up growth of materials at precise locations without requiring any additional patterning of the film being deposited.<sup>20,22,24</sup> To date, especially AS-ALD of metals<sup>21,25-30</sup> and dielectrics<sup>21,23,31</sup> has been reported in the literature. These studies are being considered promising in terms of patterning ALD grown films for applications in nanoelectronics<sup>22,32,33</sup> and catalysis.<sup>34,35</sup> Area-selective

ALD of 2D TMD layers has however, remained unexplored. Ideally, an AS-ALD process should enable area-selective growth and at the same time offer the merits of conventional ALD processes including angstrom-level thickness control, uniform and conformal film growth over large-area substrates and high aspect ratio 3D structures, and low-temperature processing (typically  $T \leq 450$  °C).<sup>36-41</sup> Therefore, there is considerable interest in developing AS-ALD processes for selectively depositing TMD layers.

Selective growth via AS-ALD can be realized by deactivating the non-growth area for a specific ALD chemistry.<sup>20,21</sup> Select areas of the substrate can be functionalized with a blocking layer that allows growth only on the non-functionalized areas of the substrate.<sup>20</sup> Self-assembled monolayers (SAMs) and small inhibitor molecules have been investigated as blocking agents in AS-ALD processes. Recently, Mameli et al. showcased the efficacy of vapour-phase dosed acetylacetonate inhibitor molecules (referred to as Hacac) in blocking precursor adsorption and thereby, blocking film growth on  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  surfaces during AS-ALD of  $\text{SiO}_2$ .<sup>23</sup> The Hacac molecules were dosed every cycle unlike the one time application of SAMs in other AS-ALD processes, which makes the approach compatible with a wider range of processes including plasma-enhanced ALD (PEALD). Taking a cue from these results, in this work, we use Hacac as inhibitor to selectively deposit mono-to-multilayers of  $\text{WS}_2$ . Selective growth was realized on (1)  $\text{SiO}_2$  (commonly used substrate for the growth of 2D TMD layers), (2) 2D TMDs such as  $\text{MoS}_2$ ,  $\text{NbS}_2$ , and  $\text{TiS}_2$  and (3) transition metal oxides such as  $\text{MoO}_3$ ,  $\text{Nb}_2\text{O}_5$  and  $\text{WO}_3$  while effectively blocking growth on  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  and  $\text{HfO}_2$  surfaces at a low deposition temperature of 250 °C. We expect this first AS-ALD process for 2D- $\text{WS}_2$  to enable exploration of area-selective ALD processes for other functional 2D materials.

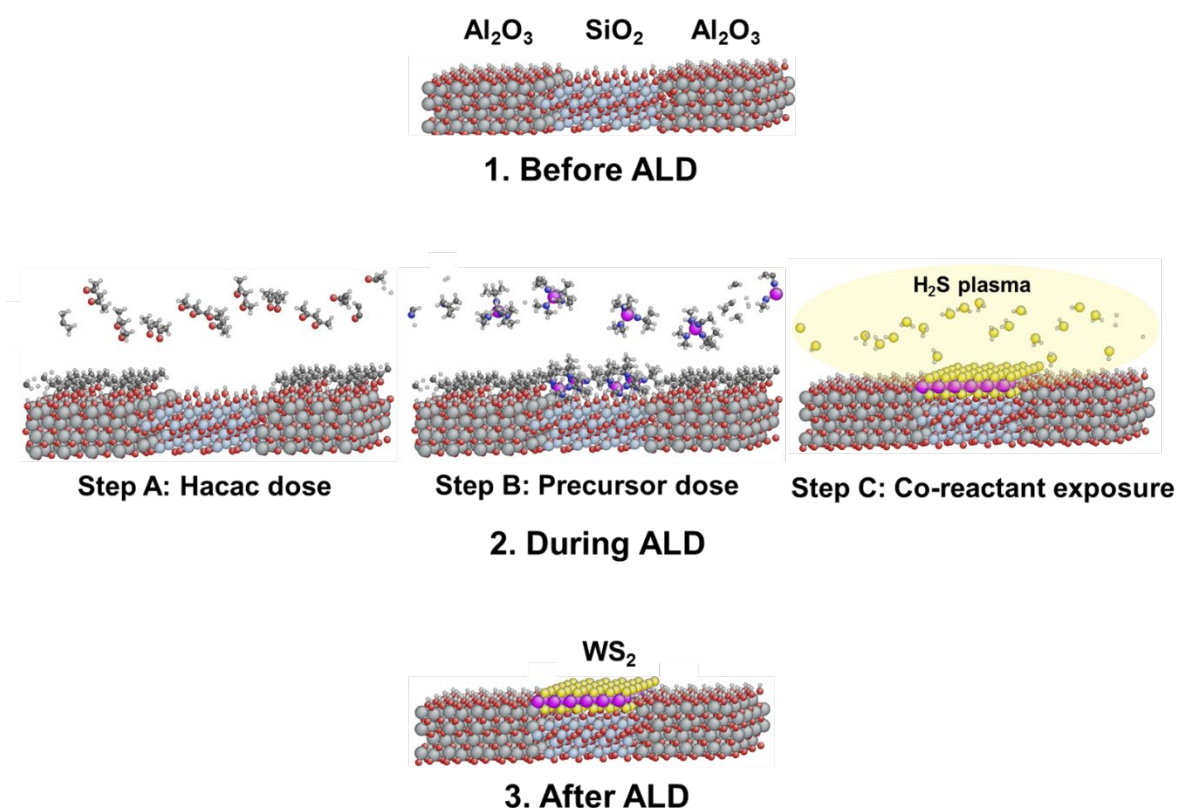


Figure 1. Schematic illustration of the WS<sub>2</sub> area-selective ALD process using *ABC-type* ALD cycles. The Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/SiO<sub>2</sub> patterned surface is shown before, during, and after ALD. The individual ALD steps of the *ABC-type* ALD cycle are indicated: Step A – Hacac dose, Step B – bis(*tert*-butylimido)-bis(dimethylamido)-tungsten precursor dose, and Step C – H<sub>2</sub>S plasma exposure. Using this process, WS<sub>2</sub> is selectively deposited on SiO<sub>2</sub> in presence of Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>.

A schematic of our AS-ALD approach is shown in Figure 1 for pre-patterned Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> (non-growth area) and SiO<sub>2</sub> (growth area) surfaces. It is based on a three-step (i.e. *ABC-type*) ALD process. In step A, we dose Hacac molecules that adsorb only on the Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> surface and not on the SiO<sub>2</sub> surface. In step B, the precursor adsorption is blocked by the adsorbed Hacac inhibitor molecules on the Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> surface, while the tungsten precursor (bis(*tert*-butylimido)-bis(dimethylamido)-tungsten) readily adsorbs on the SiO<sub>2</sub> surface. In the final step C, the H<sub>2</sub>S plasma functions as the ALD co-reactant enabling the growth of WS<sub>2</sub> on SiO<sub>2</sub>. On the Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> surface, it removes the adsorbed inhibitor molecules from the Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> surface. Such ALD cycles are repeated to selectively deposit WS<sub>2</sub> films on SiO<sub>2</sub> surfaces. The BC steps of the ABC cycles used in this work were adopted from our previously reported WS<sub>2</sub> ALD process which resulted in the growth of WS<sub>2</sub> films.<sup>42</sup>

Figure 2a shows the nucleation curves for the *ABC-type* WS<sub>2</sub> ALD process on SiO<sub>2</sub> (growth area) and Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> (non-growth area), as-determined from *in situ* spectroscopic ellipsometry (SE). The plot shows that WS<sub>2</sub> grows readily on SiO<sub>2</sub> surfaces without any growth delay. The film thickness increases linearly with number of ALD cycles, a characteristic of the ALD growth behaviour, with a growth per cycle (GPC) of ~0.6 Å. On the other hand, for the same *ABC-type* WS<sub>2</sub> ALD process on Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>, a growth delay of ~20 ALD cycles is observed. These results indicate that ~1 nm of WS<sub>2</sub> (at least one monolayer) can be selectively deposited on SiO<sub>2</sub> while blocking the growth on Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>. When performing BC cycles (without the use of Hacac), no

growth delay was observed on  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  as evidenced by a linear increase in thickness with the number of ALD cycles (Figure S1).

The nucleation behaviour of our process was corroborated with XPS measurements (Figure 2b-c). In line with the *in situ* SE data, the integrated area of the XPS W4f peaks increased linearly with number of ALD cycles on  $\text{SiO}_2$ , while a growth delay of  $\sim 20$  ALD cycles was observed on  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  (see Figure S2a-d for W and S XPS peak evolution). As shown in Figure 2c, distinct W4f doublet peaks corresponding to  $\text{WS}_2$  ( $\text{W}^{+4}$  oxidation state, binding energy =  $\sim 32.1$  eV and  $\sim 34.2$  eV) were observed on the  $\text{SiO}_2$  surface, whereas no W4f core level ( $\text{W}^{+4}$ ) signals were observed on the  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  surface after 20 ALD cycles. Note that the XPS detection limit for W on top of  $\text{SiO}_2$  and  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  was estimated to be below 0.01 monolayer or  $\sim 2 \times 10^{12}$  atoms/ $\text{cm}^2$ .<sup>43</sup> A film stoichiometry (S:W) of 2.3 was determined from XPS measurements on  $\text{SiO}_2$  similar to our previous work.<sup>42</sup> The binding energy of the XPS W4f core levels ( $\text{W}4f_{7/2}$  and  $\text{W}4f_{5/2}$ ) appears to match those commonly observed for the 1T phase of  $\text{WS}_2$ .<sup>44</sup> However, we have previously<sup>42</sup> established the growth of 2H phase of  $\text{WS}_2$  layers for the same ALD process at a similar temperature (at 300 °C using XRD measurements). So we expect these layers to be in 2H phase.

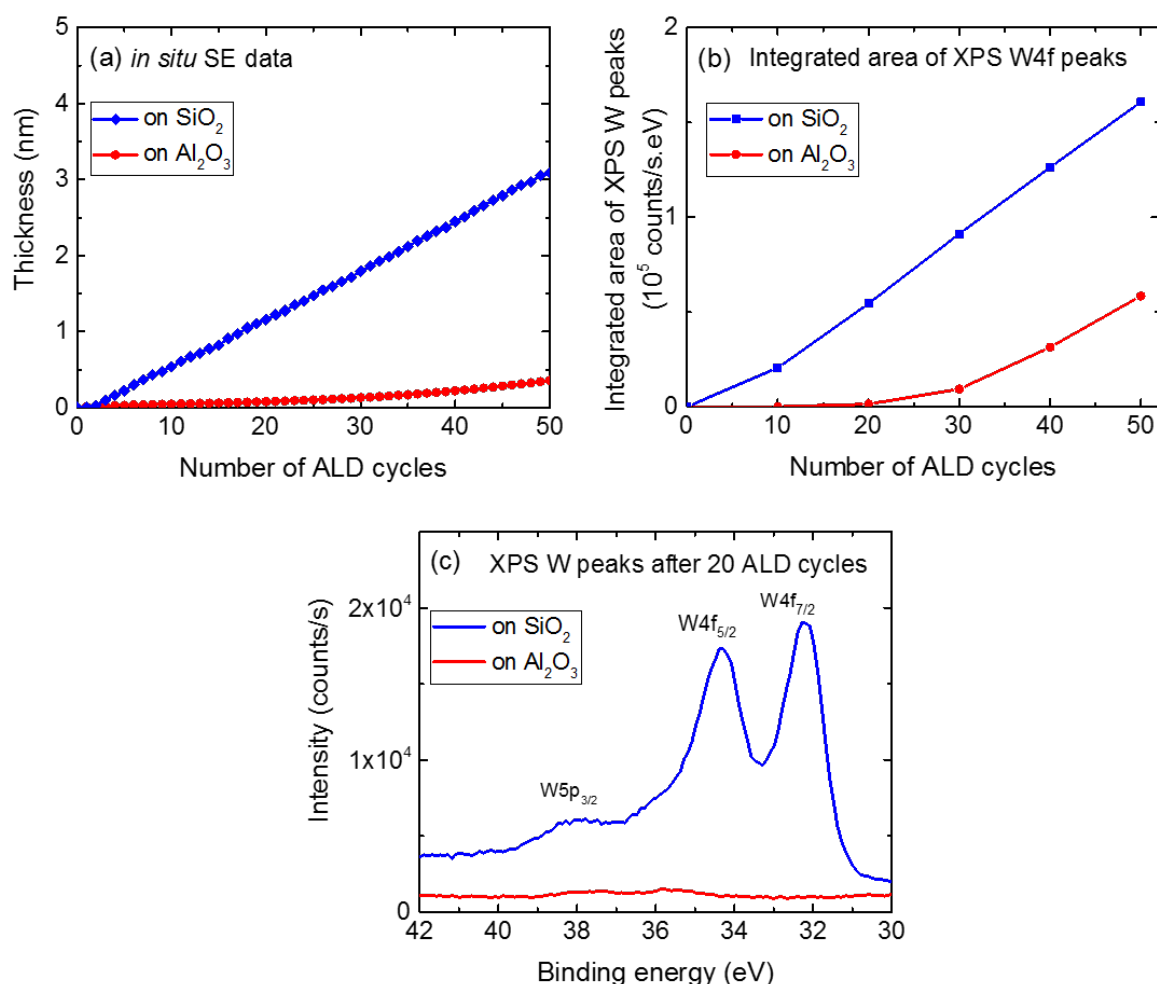


Figure 2. (a) Film thickness as a function of number ALD cycles for the *ABC-type*  $\text{WS}_2$  process on  $\text{SiO}_2$  (growth area) and  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  (non-growth area), as determined from *in situ* SE. (b) The integrated area of XPS W peaks after various number of ALD cycles determined for the  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  and  $\text{SiO}_2$  surfaces. (c) Raw

XPS spectra of the W4f core level after 20 ALD cycles on the Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> and SiO<sub>2</sub> surfaces. XPS measurements were performed on samples deposited at 250 °C.

On SiO<sub>2</sub>, the adsorption of Hacac molecules is known to be very minimal relative to Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub><sup>23</sup> and in line with this, no growth delay was observed in this work as discussed above (Figure 2a,b). Furthermore, XPS depth profiling of the WS<sub>2</sub> films revealed no carbon impurity incorporation from Hacac molecules (Figure S2e). These results confirm that the addition of Hacac (step A) to the WS<sub>2</sub> ALD process (steps B, C) does not influence the WS<sub>2</sub> deposition on a SiO<sub>2</sub> starting surface and on the WS<sub>2</sub> itself. Therefore, our process can be used to selectively deposit pure WS<sub>2</sub> (~2 monolayers) with angstrom-level thickness control on SiO<sub>2</sub> in presence of Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>.

To quantify the area-selectivity of our process, we use the accepted definition of selectivity in the field of area-selective deposition<sup>45,46</sup>:

$$selectivity = \frac{\theta_{GA} - \theta_{NGA}}{\theta_{GA} + \theta_{NGA}}$$

where,  $\theta_{GA}$  and  $\theta_{NGA}$  represent the amount of material present (WS<sub>2</sub> in this case) on the growth and non-growth areas, respectively. Using this definition, the selectivity of the *ABC-type* WS<sub>2</sub> ALD process was calculated using the number of W XPS counts in Figure 2b. After 20 ALD cycles, a high selectivity value of ~0.95 was obtained. This corresponds to a selective deposition of WS<sub>2</sub> with a thickness of ~1nm, which is more than one monolayer (one monolayer of WS<sub>2</sub> ~0.65 nm). After 30 cycles, the selectivity was determined to be ~0.82. This corresponds to a selective deposition of ~3 monolayers of WS<sub>2</sub>. With increasing number of ALD cycles, the selectivity starts to decrease drastically (0.45 after 50 ALD cycles). The loss in selectivity primarily arises from ineffective blocking of precursor adsorption by Hacac with increasing number of ALD cycles. A degraded blocking of the precursor adsorption can occur due to the introduction of surface defects that influence Hacac adsorption negatively and/or incomplete Hacac coverage that allows the precursor molecules to access certain surface reactive sites.<sup>23</sup>

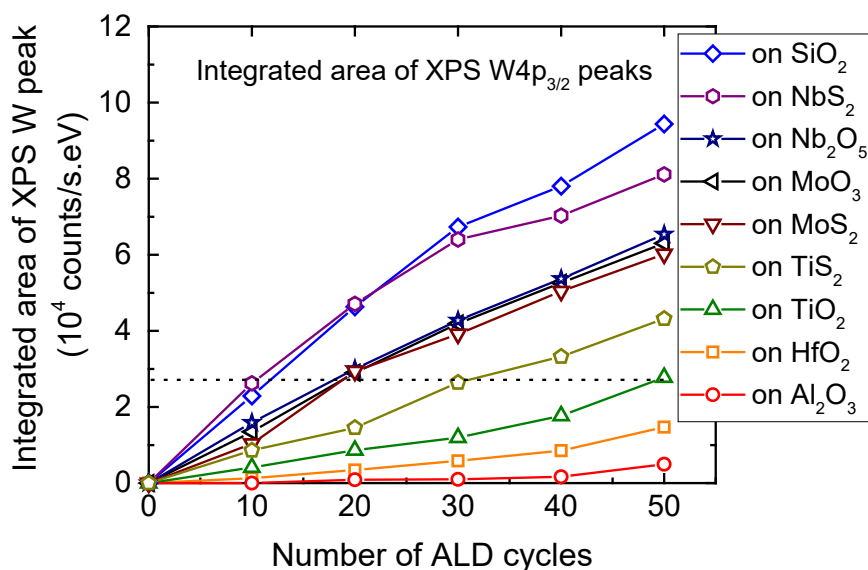


Figure 3. Integrated area of XPS W4p<sub>3/2</sub> peaks as a function of number ALD cycles for the *ABC-type* WS<sub>2</sub> process on various starting surfaces. The dotted black line serves as a reference to the integrated area of XPS W4p<sub>3/2</sub> peak ( $2.7 \times 10^4$  counts/s.eV) corresponding to a monolayer of WS<sub>2</sub> deposited on SiO<sub>2</sub> (prepared using ~12 ALD cycles, Figure 2a).

To explore the versatility of our process on various surfaces, the *ABC-type* WS<sub>2</sub> ALD cycles were performed on several starting surfaces including TMDs and transition metal oxides as shown in Figure 3. The integrated area of the XPS W4p<sub>3/2</sub> peaks on these surfaces were used to compare the ALD growth. The W4p<sub>3/2</sub> peaks were used for establishing the nucleation curves in Figure 3 instead of the W4f peaks as the W4f peaks overlaps with some of the elemental XPS peaks of the surface constituents (e.g. Hf5p<sub>3/2</sub> and Ti3p<sub>3/2</sub>, Figure S3). Among various starting surfaces investigated, a growth delay of ~10 ALD cycles was observed on HfO<sub>2</sub> (Figure 3). Even after 50 ALD cycles, the integrated W4p<sub>3/2</sub> peak area was significantly lower on HfO<sub>2</sub> when compared to the peak area determined for a monolayer of WS<sub>2</sub> deposited on SiO<sub>2</sub> (dotted black line). The integrated W4p<sub>3/2</sub> peak area was observed to be also significantly lower on TiO<sub>2</sub>. On the other hand, characteristic XPS W4p<sub>3/2</sub> peaks with relatively large integrated peak areas were observed on 2D TMDs including MoS<sub>2</sub>, NbS<sub>2</sub>, and TiS<sub>2</sub> starting surfaces, which indicated WS<sub>2</sub> film growth without any significant growth delay. As WS<sub>2</sub> grows readily on several TMDs surfaces, our process can be also used to selectively grow 2D TMD vertical heterostructures (e.g., WS<sub>2</sub> on MoS<sub>2</sub>) in presence of the non-growth areas ( i.e. Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> and HfO<sub>2</sub>). Immediate film growth was also observed on transition metal oxides such as MoO<sub>3</sub> and Nb<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub> surfaces.

Raman spectroscopy is a widely used technique to establish and characterize the growth of crystalline TMD layers. Raman measurements revealed that our as-deposited AS-ALD WS<sub>2</sub> films on SiO<sub>2</sub> at 250° C were amorphous in nature as signature WS<sub>2</sub> Raman fingerprints were not observed. Cross-section TEM images (Figure S4a) indicated the growth of an amorphous WS<sub>2</sub> film matrix embedded with nano-crystalline regions. The growth mechanism for ALD MX<sub>2</sub> layers (both crystalline and amorphous) is not well understood in the literature. In our work, we believe, the growth mechanism for amorphous WS<sub>2</sub> layers is expected to occur similar to that of crystalline WS<sub>2</sub> layers with the exception of long-range ordering of the layers. A model for the WS<sub>2</sub> crystalline film growth during plasma-ALD is described in our previous works.<sup>42,47</sup> The growth mode in amorphous WS<sub>2</sub> films (layer by layer or island growth *etc.*) could vary depending upon the processing conditions and the defects present on the growth surface.

In order to improve the crystallinity of WS<sub>2</sub> layers, the samples were annealed at 450 °C in a H<sub>2</sub>S gas atmosphere for 30 min in the same ALD reactor (pressure during annealing = 300 mTorr). WS<sub>2</sub> is considered as a promising material for applications such as low-power devices in the back-end-of-line (BEOL).<sup>3</sup> Hence, the films were annealed within the thermal budget of BEOL compatible processing ( $\leq 450^\circ\text{C}$ ). Upon annealing, signature Raman vibration modes for crystalline WS<sub>2</sub> were observed on SiO<sub>2</sub> (Figure 4b). The two characteristic Raman modes at 356 cm<sup>-1</sup> and 418 cm<sup>-1</sup> wavenumbers correspond to the WS<sub>2</sub> in-plane ( $E_{2g}^1$ ) and out-of-plane ( $A_{1g}$ ) vibrations.<sup>48-50</sup> Cross-section TEM imaging (Figure S4b) showed a significant improvement in the crystallinity of the WS<sub>2</sub> layers upon annealing. The approximate grain size was ~10 nm as deduced from top-view TEM (Figure S4c and d). A detailed study on the fabrication and characterization of electronic devices such as field effect transistors (FETs) using the annealed WS<sub>2</sub> layers (including temperature dependent resistivity measurements) will



be performed in a separate study. The root mean square (rms) surface roughness of the WS<sub>2</sub> films increased from ~0.1 to ~0.4 nm upon annealing, as-determined from AFM measurements (Figure S5). No Raman peaks were observed after performing WS<sub>2</sub> *ABC* cycles on Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> as expected (Figure 4b).

As a proof-of-concept, we tested our *ABC-type* AS-ALD process on patterned Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/SiO<sub>2</sub> surfaces. ALD grown Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> was patterned on ALD grown SiO<sub>2</sub> (Figure 4a) using a regular lift-off process. After performing 20 ALD cycles, the patterned samples were annealed at 450 °C in a H<sub>2</sub>S atmosphere. Raman spectroscopy line scans were performed to investigate the selectivity over the patterned surfaces. The line scan of the E<sub>2g</sub><sup>1</sup> Raman mode over the patterned surface revealed very clear and sharp transitions at the SiO<sub>2</sub>-Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> interfaces with steep slopes (Figure 4c).

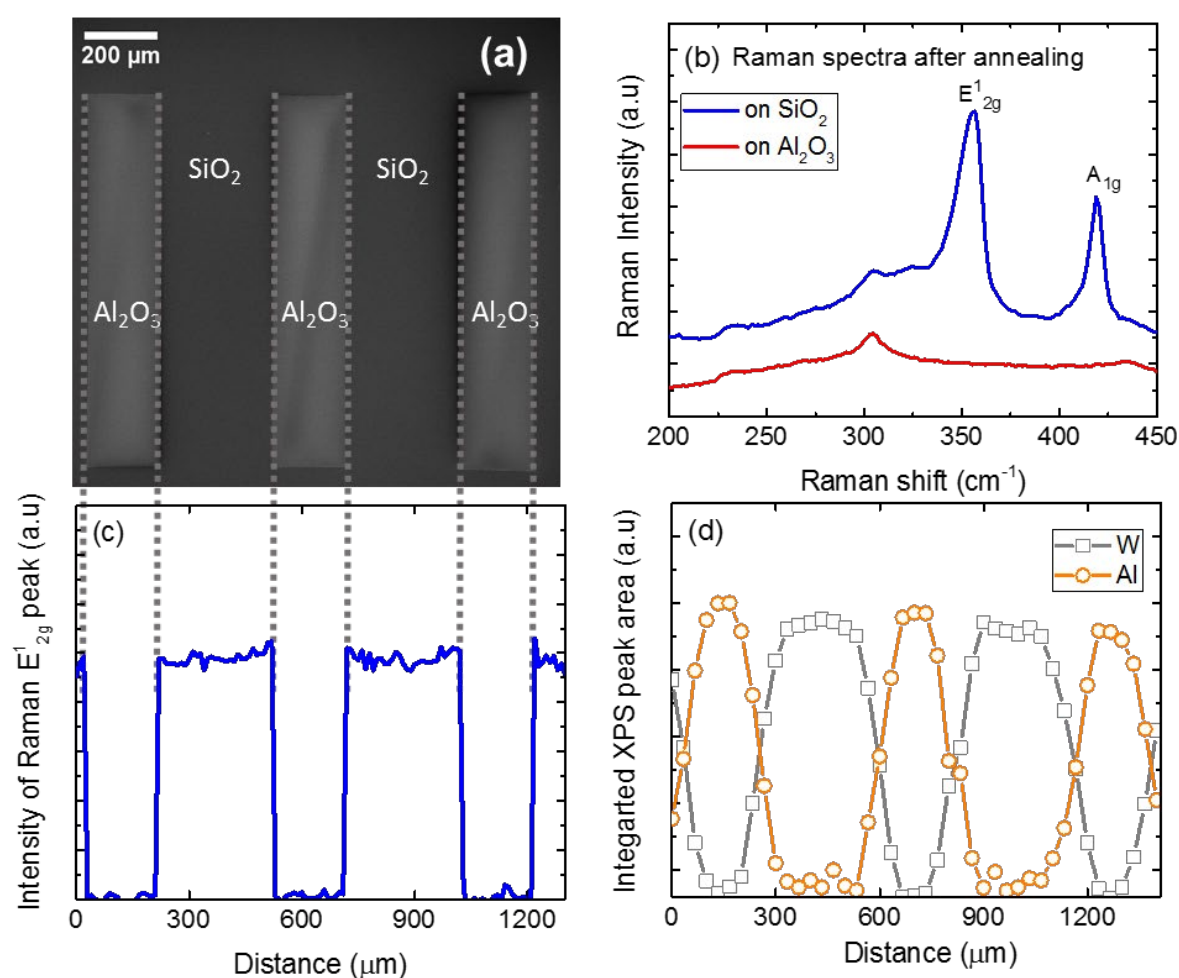


Figure 4. (a) Scanning electron microscopy (SEM) images of the Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/SiO<sub>2</sub> patterned samples. (b) Raman spectra showing the characteristic in-plane (E<sub>2g</sub><sup>1</sup>) and out-of-plane (A<sub>1g</sub>) Raman modes of WS<sub>2</sub> on SiO<sub>2</sub> after annealing at 450 °C and (c) the corresponding Raman E<sub>2g</sub><sup>1</sup> peak intensity line scans over the Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/SiO<sub>2</sub> patterned samples after 20 *ABC-type* WS<sub>2</sub> ALD cycles. (d) XPS elemental W and Al line scans after 20 *ABC-type* WS<sub>2</sub> ALD cycles on the Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/SiO<sub>2</sub> patterned samples.

XPS line scans were also performed on the annealed patterns to investigate the selectivity (see Figure S6 for XPS W4f core level spectra). The XPS line scans in Figure 4d show strong W

signals in the SiO<sub>2</sub> regions whereas, no W signals were observed in the Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> regions. The overlap of the W and Al line scans at the interface can be attributed to the large spot size of the X-ray beam (~70 μm), which is comparable to the region of overlap and much larger than the spot size of the Raman laser (~5 μm).

In conclusion, we have demonstrated the area-selective deposition of 2D WS<sub>2</sub> nanolayers using ALD in a bottom-up processing approach. AS-ALD of WS<sub>2</sub> was achieved using an acetylacetone (Hacac) inhibitor (A), bis(*tert*-butylimido)-bis(dimethylamido)-tungsten precursor (B), and H<sub>2</sub>S plasma (C) pulses in an *ABC-type* ALD process at a low deposition temperature of 250 °C. With this approach, WS<sub>2</sub> nanolayers are readily deposited on SiO<sub>2</sub>, various 2D TMDs and transition metal oxides, while growth on Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> and HfO<sub>2</sub> surfaces is effectively blocked. On the growth areas, pure WS<sub>2</sub> is deposited with angstrom-level thickness control. The AS-ALD WS<sub>2</sub> films exhibited sharp Raman peaks, a fingerprint of crystalline film growth, upon annealing at BEOL compatible temperatures (≤450 °C). As a proof of concept, the AS-ALD process has been demonstrated on patterned Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/SiO<sub>2</sub> surfaces. Raman line scans over the SiO<sub>2</sub>/Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> patterns showed very sharp peak intensity transitions at the interface. The selectivity of our process was quantified and after 20 ALD cycles (at least one monolayer) a high selectivity of 0.95 is obtained. The results obtained in this work can be used as a platform to further explore the area-selective deposition of other 2D TMD materials.

## EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES

All depositions were performed in a commercial FlexAL ALD reactor from Oxford Instruments. In essence, the reaction chamber is equipped with a remote inductively coupled plasma (ICP) source, a 200 mm substrate table, and a turbo molecular pump which enables a base pressure of 10<sup>-6</sup> Torr. The reaction chamber wall temperature was set to 150 °C (maximum possible value) and the substrate table temperature was set to 250 °C. With these settings, the substrate temperature was estimated to be ~200 °C using a thermocouple on reference samples. The mismatch between the set and the estimate temperature can arise from limited contact in vacuum. Table S1 compares the set temperature (referred to as deposition temperature) and estimated temperatures. Throughout this work, deposition temperatures are used for discussion. The WS<sub>2</sub> AS-ALD process was primarily tested and characterized on SiO<sub>2</sub> (growth area) and Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> (non-growth area). Both SiO<sub>2</sub> and Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> (~30 nm) were deposited on *c*-Si with 450 nm thermal oxide using well-established ALD processes. Other starting surfaces reported in this work (various 2D TMDs and transition metal oxides) were also deposited using ALD processes. All substrates were subjected to a 20 minute pre-heating step in a 200 mTorr Ar environment to stabilize the substrate temperature. The substrates were then subjected to a H<sub>2</sub> plasma for 5 minutes prior to the AS-ALD process. The H<sub>2</sub> plasma power was set to 500 W and the pressure in the chamber was maintained at 50 mTorr. The following optimized exposures were used in our PEALD recipe: 3 pulses of 5 s each for the Hacac dose (Step A), 10 s for the bis(*tert*-butylimido)-bis(dimethylamido)-tungsten precursor dose (Step B), and 60 s for the H<sub>2</sub>S plasma exposure (Step C). The Hacac inhibitor (Sigma Aldrich, ≥99% purity) was stored in a canister at room temperature and was vapour drawn into the reaction chamber. The two-step (*BC*) WS<sub>2</sub> PEALD recipe employing the tungsten precursor and H<sub>2</sub>S plasma pulses reported in our previous work was used as a starting point to deposit WS<sub>2</sub> films.<sup>42</sup> The growth inhibition on Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> and thereby, the selectivity of our process was observed to be significantly dependent on ALD processing conditions including H<sub>2</sub>S plasma exposure time, H<sub>2</sub> plasma pre-treatment of Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> and deposition temperature. This is further described in the supporting information

(Figure S7 and S8). Frequent usage of H<sub>2</sub>S plasma exposures beyond 60 s led to flaking of deposited material on the substrate table. Thus, H<sub>2</sub>S plasma exposures were seemingly limited to 60 s during most of our processing.

*In situ* spectroscopic ellipsometry (SE) was used to measure the apparent WS<sub>2</sub> film thickness using a B-spline function or Cauchy-based parametrization to model the experimental SE data. All *in situ* SE measurements were performed using a J.A. Woollam M2000F ellipsometer. X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) was used to detect the presence of W on SiO<sub>2</sub> and Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> surfaces. The XPS detection limit for W on top of SiO<sub>2</sub> and Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> was determined to be below ~0.01 monolayer (~2 × 10<sup>12</sup> atoms/cm<sup>2</sup>).<sup>43</sup> All XPS studies were carried out using a Thermo Scientific KA1066 spectrometer with monochromatic Al K $\alpha$  X-ray source ( $h\nu = 1486.6$  eV). The spot size of the incident X-rays was ~70  $\mu$ m. XPS data analysis was carried out using the Advantage XPS software.

Scanning electron microscopy (SEM) images were obtained using a Zeiss Sigma microscope with an in-column, secondary electron detector. The acceleration voltage of the electron beam was 2 keV. Raman spectroscopy was performed to investigate the characteristic vibrational modes in WS<sub>2</sub> films. High-angle annular dark field (HAADF) scanning transmission electron microscopy (STEM) images were obtained using a probe-corrected JEOL JEM-ARM200F transmission electron microscope (TEM) operated at 80 kV. For top-view STEM imaging, WS<sub>2</sub> layers were deposited on Si<sub>3</sub>N<sub>4</sub> windows coated with 5 nm of ALD SiO<sub>2</sub>. For cross-section TEM studies, WS<sub>2</sub> layers deposited on Si<sub>3</sub>N<sub>4</sub> windows were coated with an additional SiO<sub>2</sub> protective layer on top. A focused ion beam was used to create a cross-sectional sample using the standard lift-out method. Raman spectra were obtained using a Renishaw Invia Raman microscope equipped with a 514 nm laser at a power of ~0.5 mW. The laser spot size was ~5  $\mu$ m. Atomic force microscopy (AFM) measurements were performed using a NT-MDT Solver P47 AFM.

## ASSOCIATED CONTENT

### Supporting information

Film growth on Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>: With and without Hacac; XPS data: tungsten and sulfur peak evolution and depth profiling of the carbon peak; Overlap of XPS Ti and Hf peaks with W4f peaks; TEM measurements: as-deposited and annealed WS<sub>2</sub>; AFM measurements: as-deposited and annealed WS<sub>2</sub>; XPS W4f core-level spectra after annealing WS<sub>2</sub> sample; Set temperature vs estimated substrate temperature; Impact of processing conditions on the growth inhibition on Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> surface.

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### TOC FIGURE

