

Sculpting vesicles with active particles

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Biological cells are able to generate intricate structures and respond to external stimuli, sculpting their membrane from inside. Simplified biomimetic systems can aid in understanding the principles which govern these shape changes and elucidate the response of the cell membrane under strong deformations. We employ a combined simulation and experimental approach to investigate different non-equilibrium shapes and active shape fluctuations of vesicles enclosing self-propelled particles [1]. Interestingly, the most pronounced shape changes are observed at relatively low particle loadings, starting with the formation of tether-like protrusions to highly branched, dendritic structures. At high volume fractions, globally deformed vesicle shapes are observed. The obtained state diagram of vesicles sculpted by active particles predicts the conditions under which local internal forces can generate dramatic cell shape changes, such as branched structures in neurons.

[1] H.R. Vutukuri et al., Nature 586, 52-56 (2020).