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Synthesis of azasilacyclopentenes and silanols *via* Huisgen cycloaddition-initiated C–H bond insertion cascades†

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An unusual transition metal-free cascade reaction of alkynyl carbonazides was discovered to form azasilacyclopentenes. Mild thermolysis afforded the products *via* a series of cyclizations, rearrangements, and an α -silyl C–H bond insertion (rather than the more common Wolff rearrangement, 1,2-shift, or β -silyl C–H insertion) to form silacyclopropanes. A mechanistic proposal for the sequence was informed by control experiments and the characterization of reaction intermediates. The substrate scope and post-cascade transformations were also explored.

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Introduction

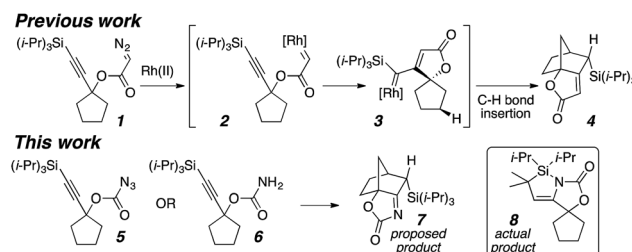
Carbenes have been employed in cyclopropanations,¹ Büchner ring expansion,² ylide formation,³ X–H bond insertion,⁴ and especially C–H bond insertions,⁵ which have provided a powerful tool for synthetic chemistry.⁶ Cascade reactions using highly reactive carbenes allow the efficient synthesis of complex molecules.⁷ Our research group recently reported the formation of bridged polycycles *via* carbene/alkyne cascade reactions terminated in C–H bond insertion (Scheme 1).⁸ We were also interested in utilizing this cascade reaction to synthesize nitrogen-containing polycyclic compounds like **7**. Instead, a complex sequence with an unusual α -silyl C–H bond insertion formed azasilacyclopentene **8** from carbonazide **5**.

Nitrenes have been used for the aziridination of olefins,⁹ the C–H amination of alkanes,¹⁰ and the synthesis of bioactive molecules.¹¹ Pioneering work from Blakey showed nitrene/alkyne cascades proceeded through an endo-cyclization with the alkyne to the postulated vinyl cation/metalloenamine **10a**, which potentially could rearrange to the α -iminometallo-carbene **10b** or react directly (Scheme 2).¹² Importantly, metallocarbene **12** could not be accessed *via* that approach, and α -diazoinimines are difficult to synthesize. Carbene **12** could be directly produced from a transition metal catalyzed triazole ring opening.¹³ The incorporation of C–H bond insertions in these

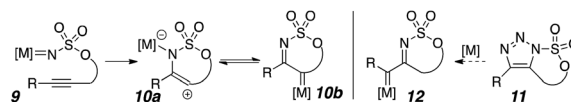
cascade reactions is still rare.^{14,15} An investigation to generate intermediate **12** and use that highly reactive species and its high potential for complex and interesting transformations has unveiled surprising and novel reactivity. Starting with carbonazides like **5**, carbene **12** was accessed *via* a metal-free Huisgen cyclization and dediazotization. From this reactive intermediate, C–H bond insertion, bond fragmentations, and pseudopericyclic rearrangements have been identified, and mechanistic intermediates isolated. Reactivity patterns suggest the intermediacy of imino-conjugated triplet carbenes.

Results and discussion

The initial goal was to establish a nitrene/alkyne cascade reaction to synthesize nitrogen-containing polycycles like **7**.



Scheme 1 Carbene- and nitrene-based cascade reactions.



Scheme 2 Nitrene and triazole carbene formation.

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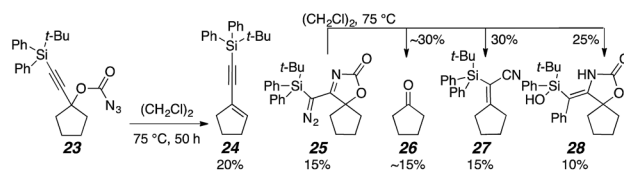
† Electronic supplementary information (ESI) available: Full experimental details and compound characterizations, including X-ray diffraction data, are provided. CCDC 1477662–1477666 and 1477728. For ESI and crystallographic data in CIF or other electronic format see DOI: 10.1039/c7sc03130k

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Treating carbamate **13** with $\text{Rh}_2(\text{esp})_2$ and $\text{PhI}(\text{OAc})_2$ resulted in the formation of multiple products: the predicted bridged tricycle **14**, propellane **15**,¹⁶ tetrahydropyranone **16**, and silyl vinyl nitrile **17** (Scheme 3).¹⁶ A control experiment revealed that acetic acid, produced during the carbamate oxidation, slowly promoted the rearrangement of **14** to propellane **15** *in situ*. This exploratory reaction demonstrated a proof-of-principle for a nitrene/alkyne cascade that results in C–H insertion to generate a C–C bond; however, controlling product selectivity was problematic. Consequently, other nitrene precursors were sought to achieve a more selective outcome.

Carbonazide¹⁷ **18** allowed an improved yield (31%) of tricycle **14** without a catalyst (Scheme 4A). Surprisingly, silanol **19** was also isolated, which was thought to be the result of silica gel-mediated hydrolysis of a labile product during purification since it was not observed in the NMR of the crude reaction material. Dimethyl carbonazide **20a** was prepared to minimize overlapping NMR signals in order to identify the immediate product of the reaction. After ^1H and ^{13}C NMR analysis, its structure was determined to be azasilacyclopentene¹⁸ **21a** (Scheme 4B). The NMR signals of **21a** (vinyl proton: 4.36 ppm; enamine carbons: 108.3 and 150.2 ppm) correlated well to those of oxasilacyclopentene **22**.¹⁹ In addition, ^{15}N NMR analysis of ^{15}N -enriched azasilacyclopentene **21b** (110.5 ppm, no signals from 305 to 375 ppm)²⁰ suggested that the nitrogen was involved in an enamine motif, corroborating the ^1H and ^{13}C NMR data. Hydrolysis of **21a** to the silanol proved to be facile with a small amount of water.

The products **19** and **21** appeared to be formed *via* C–H bond insertion at one of the isopropyl groups. In order to bias product formation toward the bridged tricycle by removing all α -silyl C–H bonds, *tert*-butyldiphenyl silylacetylene carbonazide **23** was prepared (Scheme 5). The reaction produced five compounds, **24**–**28**. The α -diazo oxazolone **25** and the silanol **28** were crystallized and analyzed by X-ray diffraction to confirm the structures shown.²¹ In a control experiment, diazoimine **25**



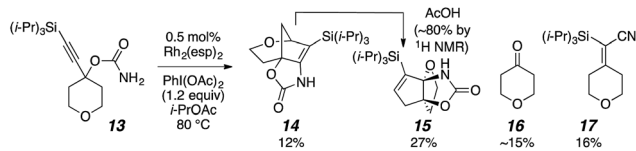
Scheme 5 Avoiding α -silyl C–H bond insertion.

was heated again to form **26**–**28**, indicating that it is a viable reaction intermediate and that the vinyl nitrile and ketone products are derived from it. Enyne **24**, however, was not observed, demonstrating that it likely formed by elimination from **23**.

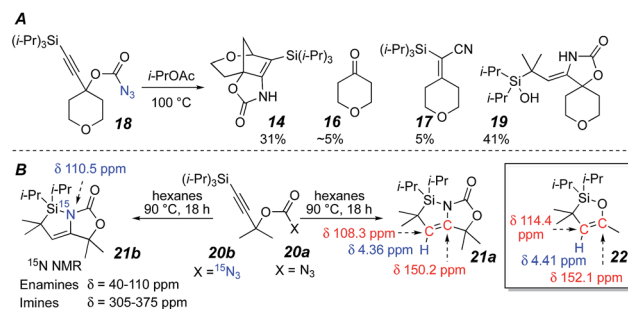
These results have been incorporated in a proposed mechanism for the cascade reaction (Scheme 6). Identification of α -diazo imine **25** suggests that a Huisgen cycloaddition²² generated triazole **30**, followed by ring opening to **31**.^{13,23} The α -imino carbene **32** (for $\text{R}_3\text{Si} = \text{Ph}_2t\text{-BuSi}$) could be directly produced *via* dinitrogen extrusion. Silanol **28** would be produced from **32** by 1,2-phenyl migration (see **33** to **34**, Path A)^{14b} and hydration. When $\text{R}_3\text{Si} = i\text{-Pr}_3\text{Si}$, loss of N_2 would form carbene **35**, which could proceed through either a transannular ring insertion into the ether-activated methylene (H^a , see Path B), or insertion into the isopropyl C–H bond (H^b , see Path C). The former leads to the bridged tricycles **36** and **14**, which can rearrange in the presence of acid to propellane **15** through an elimination/addition sequence.⁸ The latter pathway would form silacyclopropane **38**. Silacyclopropanes are usually formed through silylene transfer,²⁴ but there are a few cases of formation *via* intramolecular C–H bond insertion, though these intermediates were unstable and were not isolated.²⁵ Likewise, intermediate **38** was not stable, but rearranged²⁶ to azasilacyclopentene **39**, which could be observed and characterized spectroscopically (*vide supra*). Exposure to water rapidly hydrolyzed the weak N–Si bond to give silanol **19**.

The isolation of ketone **26** and vinyl nitrile **27** suggested either a 6-endo reaction of a nitrene derived from **29** to form zwitterion **41**, or else **41** would be derived from carbenes **32** or **35** (Path D).^{10–15} Since **26** and **27** were formed from heating diazoimine **25** (Scheme 5), it is likely that the latter route was operative. Therefore, a carbene electrocyclicization of **32** (likely pseudopericyclic) would allow the highly strained azirine **40** to be transiently formed.²⁶ Either of the C–N bonds could fragment, with an internal fragmentation forming the ring expanded product **41**. A retro-hetero Diels–Alder reaction allows for decarboxylation (Path D(a)), and 1,2-silyl migration in zwitterion **42** would give the vinyl nitriles **17** or **27**. Alternatively, C–C bond fragmentation would provide ketones **16** or **26** (Path D(b)). These pathways account for all the observed products and intermediates.

Only a few examples of intramolecular C–H bond insertion to form silacyclopropanes have been reported, and in those cases these intermediates were also fleeting and inferred from downstream products rather than observed directly.²⁵ For simple silicon-substituted carbenes like **44**, the triplet state is significantly stabilized relative to the singlet state.^{27,28} 1,2-

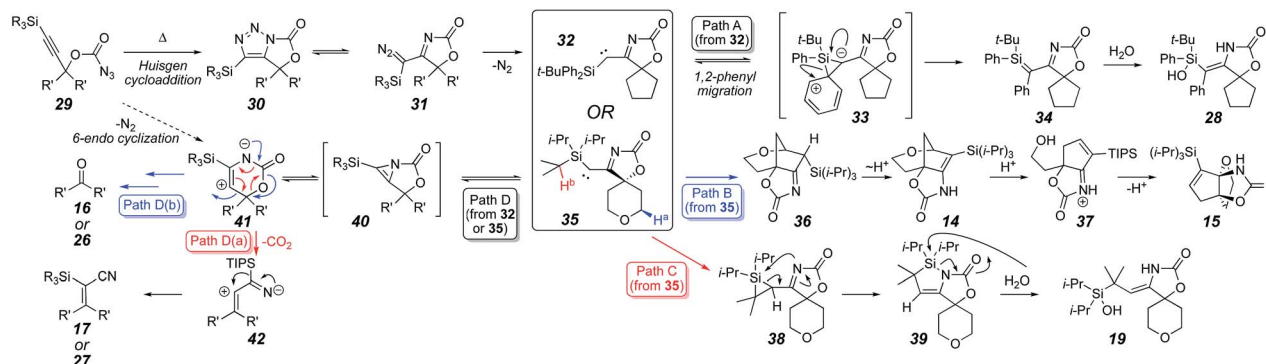


Scheme 3 Cascade reaction of a carbamate.



Scheme 4 Cascade reaction of carbonazides.





Scheme 6 Proposed mechanism.

Rearrangements to silenes are the most common outcomes for these compounds,²⁹ though cyclopropanations and C–H insertions have also been observed in suitable substrates (see 47 and 51). Intramolecular cyclopropanations appear to be possible with silyl carbenes of either a triplet or singlet nature if pendant olefins are present (47 and 49, respectively). On the other hand, the presence of a carbonyl induces more singlet-like reactivity,^{28,30} including Wolff rearrangements and X–H insertion reactions.³¹ Intramolecular C–H bond insertions may also occur for these cases, but the preference for insertion is typically at the β - or γ -position relative to silicon (see 60).³² A single report exists for imine-adjacent silyl carbene formation, which is also derived from a triazole precursor (61). In this case, the sole product was a 1,2-silyl shift to give ketene imine 63. Based on these precedents, products 36 (intramolecular C–H bond insertion) or 66 (1,2-shift: see 34, Scheme 6) would have been expected to dominate this reaction, but instead outcomes derived from silacyclopropane formation (see Schemes 3 and 4A) dominated when C–H bond insertion was possible and the formation of 66 and derivatives thereof were not observed.

The unanticipated formation of the azasilacyclopentenes from the reaction cascade prompted further investigation. The acyclic carbonazide 20a was selected to bias the reaction for azasilacyclopentene formation by eliminating competitive C–H insertion in an appended ring (Table 1, entries 1–5). A lower yield of 21a resulted from the use of a halogenated solvent, dichloroethane, but the use of hexanes resulted in fewer byproducts and a slightly higher yield (entry 3). However, the use of $\text{Rh}_2(\text{esp})_2$ or $\text{Cp}^*\text{RuCl}(\text{cod})$ ¹⁴ was deleterious (entries 4 and 5).

We were curious if C–H bond insertion would take place at different positions on larger silyl alkanes, or the α -position was preferred. However, all of the alkyl groups only generated the azasilacyclopentenes corresponding to insertion into the C–H bond alpha to silicon (entries 6–9).^{19b} These results contradict literature examples of singlet or metal carbene insertion into alkylsilanes, which show insertion primarily at the methylene or methine beta to silicon,³³ presumably due to the “ β -silicon effect”. In the examples in Table 1, none of the available β , γ , or δ -C–H bonds reacted. High regioselectivity was shown even in the isobutyl substrate 69f, where the electron-rich β -methine was untouched.

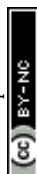
It appears that unlike the other acyl silyl carbenes in Scheme 7, the carbenes 32 and 35 are triplet carbenes and therefore exhibit diradical character.³⁵ The C–C bond formation would then proceed *via* hydrogen atom abstraction from the carbon attached to the silicon in 71 to generate an α -silyl radical³⁶ 72 (Scheme 8), which would be stabilized by back-bonding from silicon δ -orbitals.³⁷ Then, the silacyclopropane 73 would be formed from radical combination.

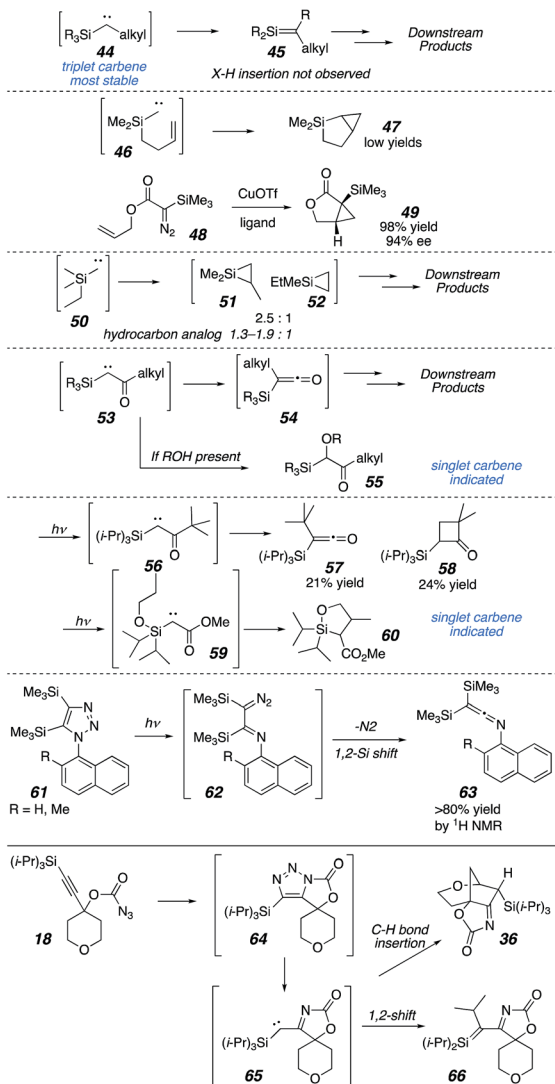
Next, a series of acyclic, cyclic, and heterocyclic carbonazides was examined (Table 2). Varying the alkyl groups at R^1

Table 1 Variation of the silyl alkyl group³⁴

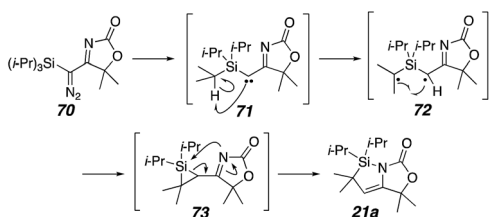
Entry	Carbonazide	Solvent	Azasilacyclopentene	Yield ^a	Silanol	Yield ^b (2 steps)
1		<i>i</i> -PrOAc		48%		
2		(CH ₂ Cl) ₂		25%		50%
3		Hexanes		52%		
4		Hexanes ^c		43%		
5		Hexanes ^d		19%		
6		Hexanes		38%		38%
7		Hexanes		42%		42%
8		Hexanes		56%		43%
9		Hexanes		56%		44%
10		Hexanes		55%		43%

^a Yield based on ¹H NMR peak integration relative to methyl-4-nitrobenzoate. ^b Isolated yields (average of 2 trials). ^c 1 mol% $\text{Rh}_2(\text{esp})_2$. ^d 2 mol% $\text{Cp}^*\text{RuCl}(\text{cod})$.





Scheme 7 Typical outcomes for silyl-substituted carbenes.



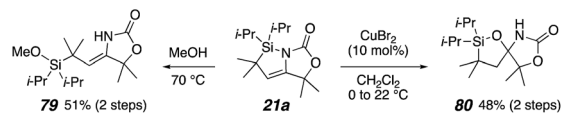
Scheme 8 Proposed triplet carbene/diradical pathway.

and R^2 of **74** does not significantly affect the formation of the azasilacyclopentene. Although an allyl group could potentially undergo cyclopropanation with an intermediate silyl carbene,^{32a,38} only the azasilacyclopentene **75e** is seen (entry 5). Cyclic substrates generally provided spiro-oxazolones (entry 6–10). Bridged polycycles were not observed, even for pyrrolidine **74i** and thiolane **74j**, where the heteroatoms could activate α -C–H bonds for carbene insertion.³⁹ Two substrates with six-membered rings provided a different result, presumably due

Table 2 Propargylic variation in the substrates³⁴

Entry	Carbonazide	Azasilycyclopentene	Yield ^a	Silanol	Yield ^b (2 steps)
1 ^c			75a 57%		76a 51%
2 ^c			75b 55%		76b 53%
3 ^c			75c 60%		76c 59%
4 ^c			75d 49%		76d 43%
5 ^c			75e 52%		76e 50%
6 ^c			75f 52%		76f 48%
7 ^c			75g 51%		76g 49%
8 ^c			75h 56%		76h 46% ¹⁶
9 ^d			75i 50%		76i 48%
10 ^d			75j 45%		76j 42%
11 ^e			75k 36%		76k 35%
12 ^d			78 21% ^b		76l 52%

^a Yield based on ¹H NMR peak integration relative to methyl-4-nitrobenzoate. ^b Isolated yields (average of 2 trials). ^c Hexanes, 90 °C. ^d Isopropyl acetate, 100 °C. ^e Hexanes, 100 °C.



Scheme 9 Reactions of azasilacyclopentene.

to greater conformational flexibility to react with the activated C–H bonds compared to the 5-membered rings (entries 11 and 12). For the 3-methyl cyclohexane **74k**, the reaction produced a 1 : 1 ratio of azasilacyclopentene **75k** and bridged tricycle **77**. For the tosyl piperidine **74l**, the major isolated product was the silanol **76l**, but some bridged bicycle was observed.⁴⁰

Preliminary tests were made for transformations of the azasilacyclopentene products. Methyl silyl ether **79** is obtained in good yield by ring opening of **21a** in methanol. Treatment of **21a** with CuBr₂ generated spiro-hemiaminal **80**.¹⁶ Silanol **69a** also produced **80** with CuBr₂, suggesting that **21a** is first hydrolyzed by adventitious water before spirocycle formation (Scheme 9).

Conclusions

A novel approach for the synthesis of azasilacyclopentenes *via* a Huisgen cycloaddition-initiated cascade reaction terminating in an α -silyl C–H bond insertion has been discovered. Control experiments suggest a likely mechanism with triplet silylcarbene intermediates undergoing C–H bond insertion at the



carbon attached to silicon to form transient silacyclopropanes. Further reaction of the azasilacyclopentene showed the formation of interesting products. Ongoing efforts are seeking selective synthesis of bridged polycycles and vinyl nitriles from the same precursors.

Conflicts of interest

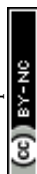
There are no conflicts of interest to declare.

Acknowledgements

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