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(54) **METHOD FOR DETECTING TARGET MOLECULE**

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(57)

ABSTRACT

This invention provides a technique enabling to detect target molecules of low concentration with high sensitivity. This invention includes (i) a step of introducing a hydrophilic solvent (42) containing beads (40),(41') into a space (30) between (a) a lower layer section (10) including a plurality of receptacles (13) each of which is capable of storing only one of the beads (41),(41') and which are separated from each other by a side wall (12) having a hydrophobic upper surface and (b) an upper layer section (20) facing a surface of the lower layer section (10) on which surface the plurality of receptacles (13) are provided; and (ii) a step of introducing a hydrophobic solvent (43) into the space (30), the step (ii) being carried out after the step (i).

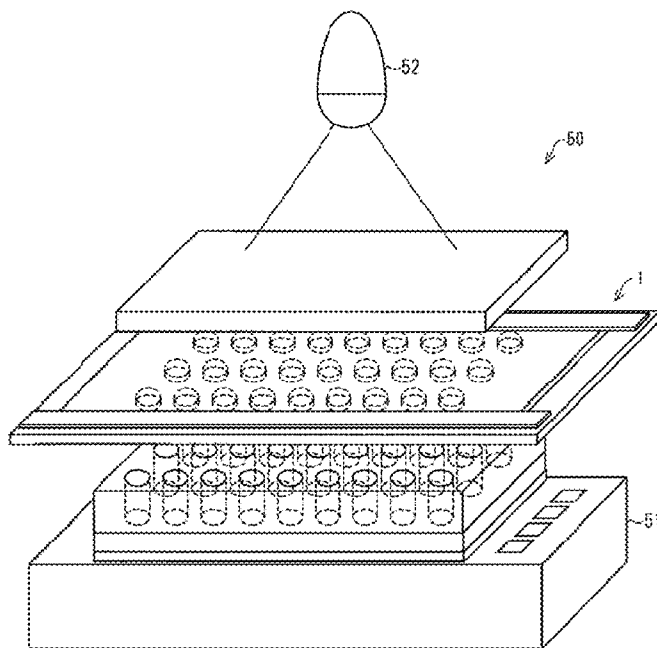


FIG. 1

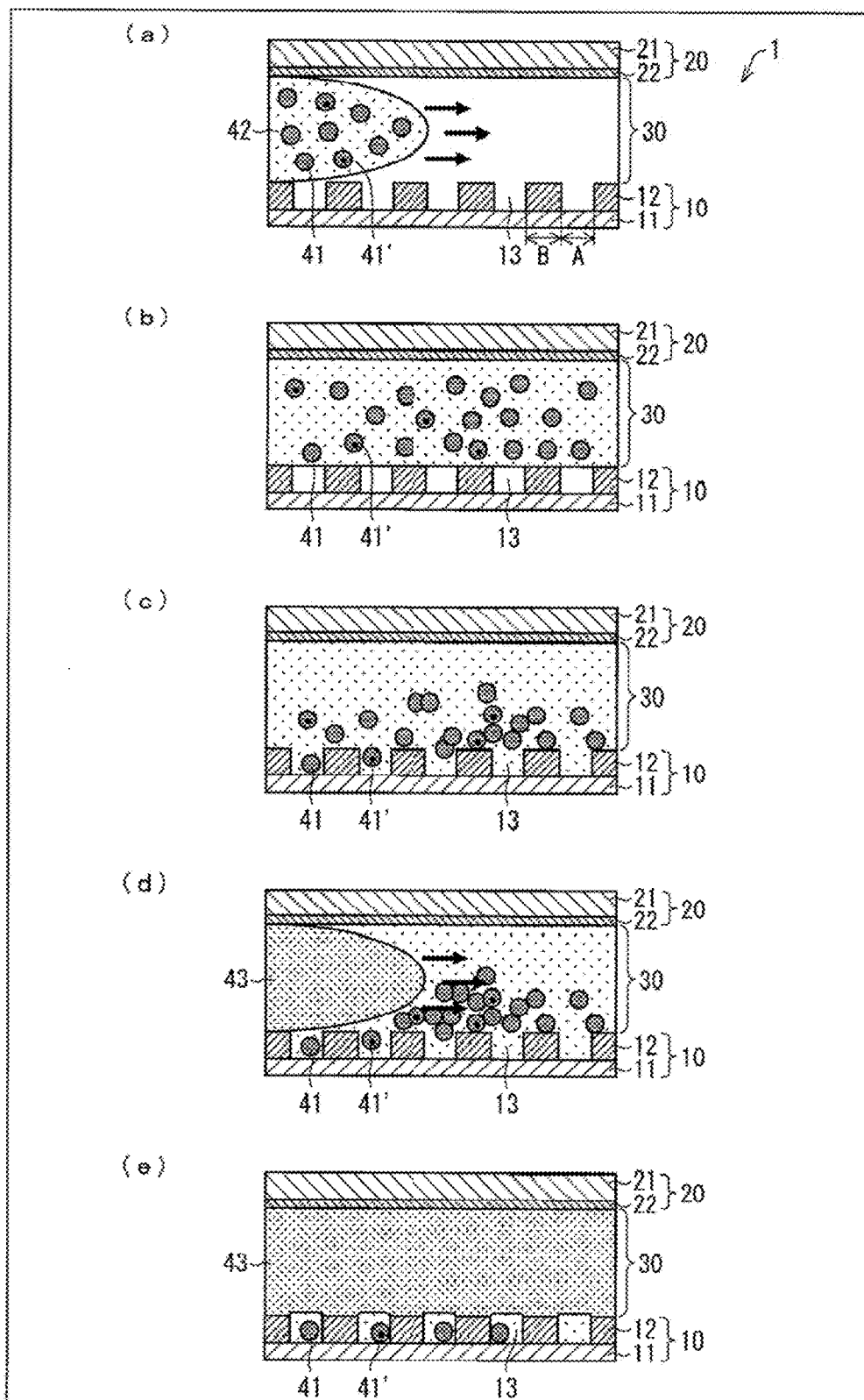


FIG. 2

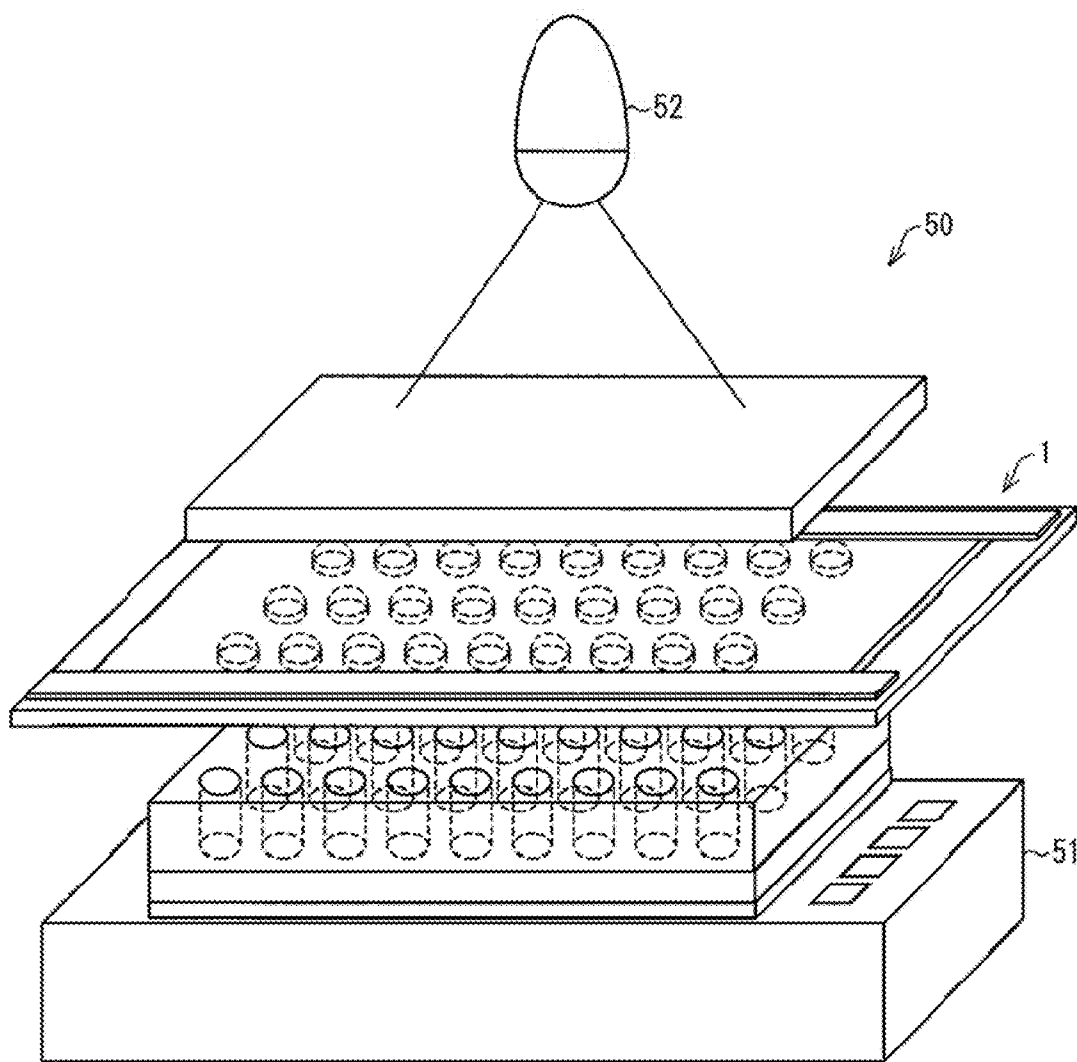


FIG. 3



FIG. 4

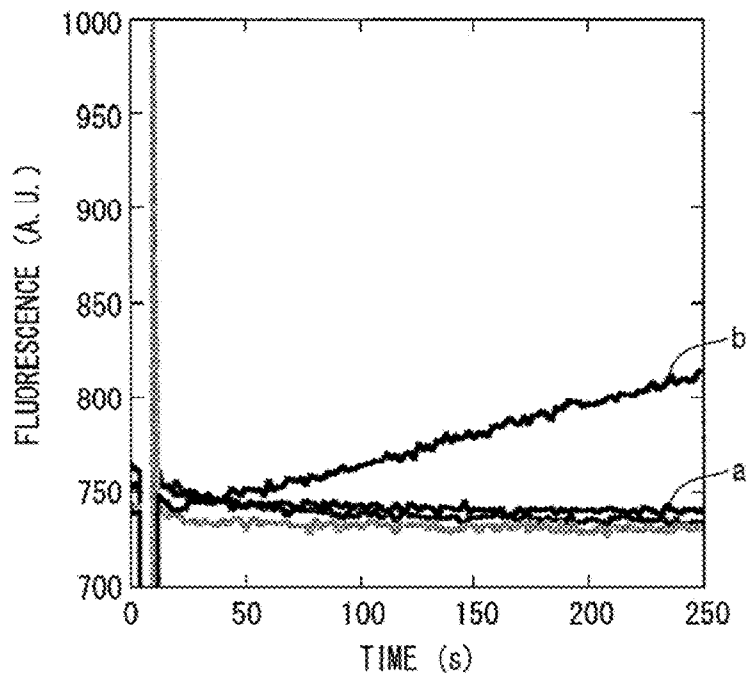


FIG. 5

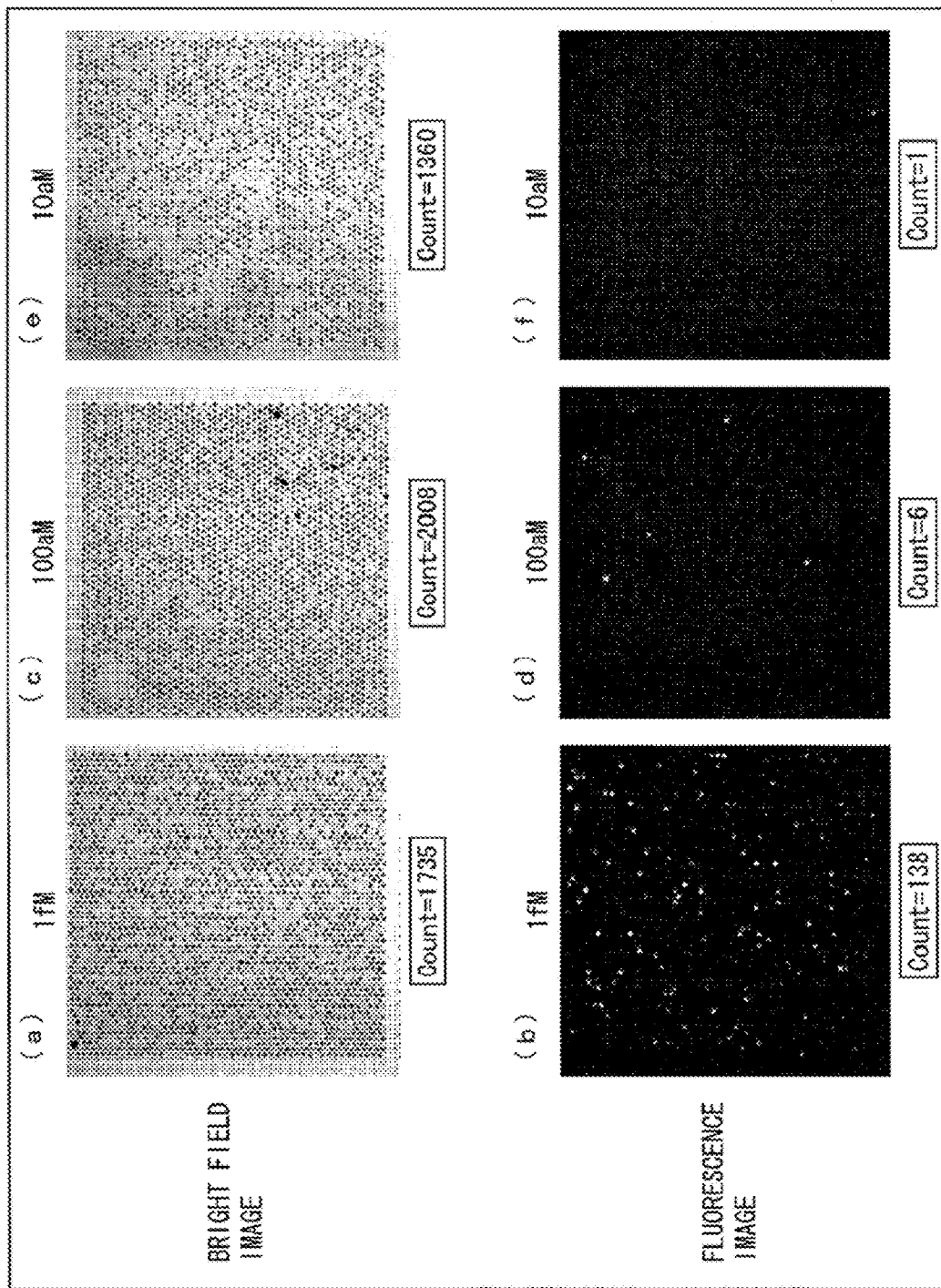


FIG. 6

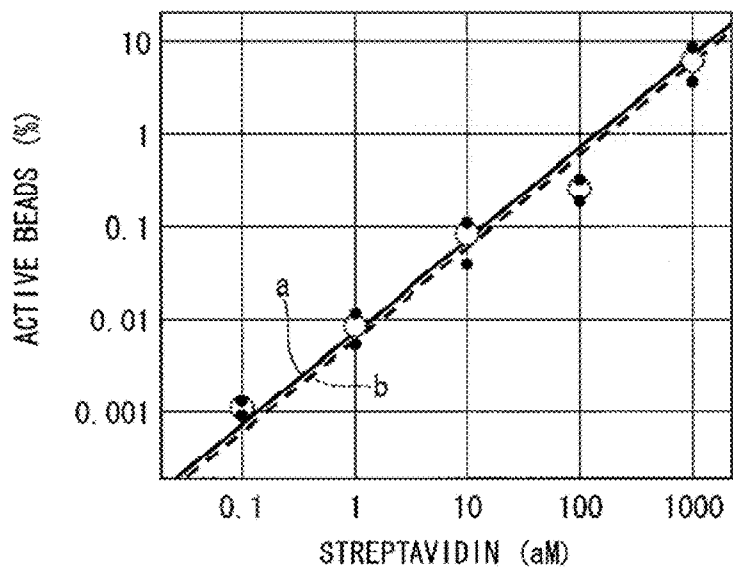


FIG. 7

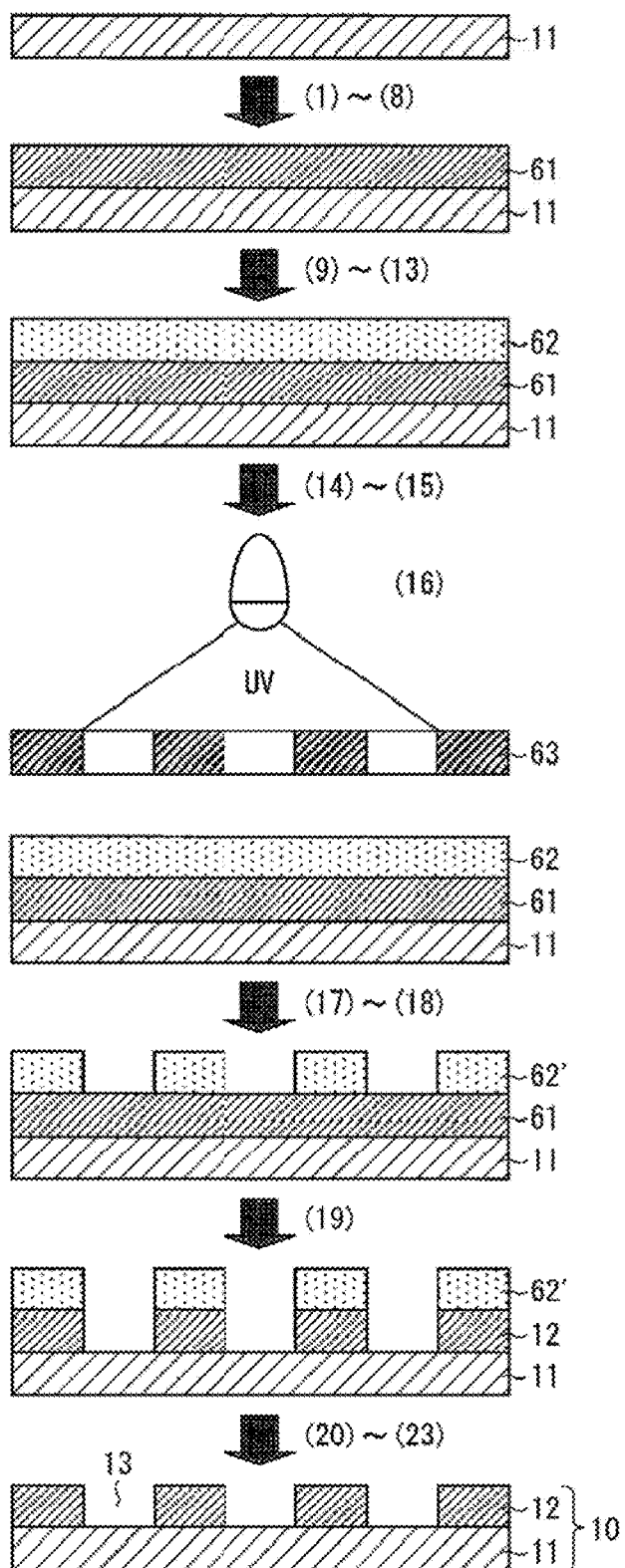
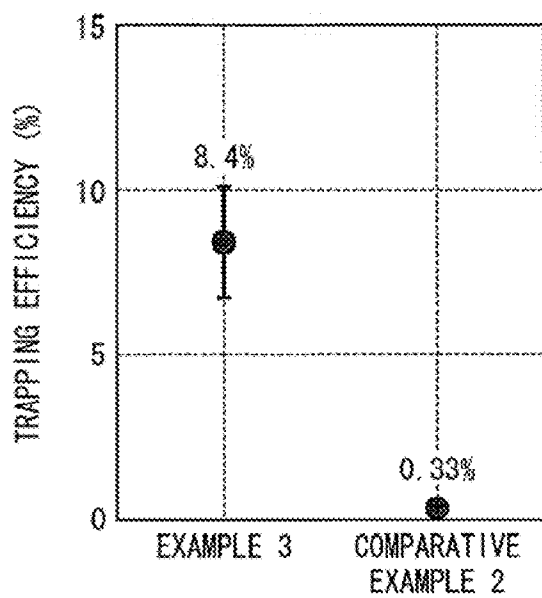


FIG. 8



METHOD FOR DETECTING TARGET MOLECULE

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This patent application is a divisional of co-pending U.S. application Ser. No. 15/351,522 having a filing date of Nov. 15, 2016, which is a divisional of then-co-pending U.S. application Ser. No. 15/082,195 having a filing date of Mar. 28, 2016, now abandoned, which is a divisional of then-co-pending U.S. application Ser. No. 14/003,509 having a § 371(c)(1), (2), (4) date of Sep. 6, 2013, now U.S. Pat. No. 9,329,174, which is a U.S. national stage entry under 35 U.S.C. § 371 of International Patent Application No. PCT/JP2012/055884 filed on Mar. 7, 2012, which claims the benefit of foreign priority to Japanese Patent Application No. JP 2011-050629 filed on Mar. 8, 2011, the disclosures of all of which are hereby incorporated by reference in their entireties. The U.S. application Ser. No. 15/351,522 was published on Apr. 27, 2017, as US 2017/0115284 A1. The U.S. application Ser. No. 15/082,195 was published on Aug. 4, 2016, as US 2016/0223531 A1. The International Application was published in Japanese on Sep. 13, 2012, as International Publication No. WO 2012/121310 A1 under PCT Article 21(2).

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0002] The present invention relates to a bead sealing method (i.e., a method for sealing beads), a method for detecting a target molecule, an array, a kit, and a target molecule detection device.

BACKGROUND ART

[0003] There has been known a single-molecule assay as a method for carrying out various assays by observing biomolecules such as proteins and nucleic acids in such a manner that the biomolecules are individually identified. In order to carry out the single-molecule assay, there have been known some methods.

[0004] Patent Literature 1 discloses a micro chamber for detecting single-molecule enzyme activity. This micro chamber includes a container part into which a liquid droplet can be sealed and which has capacity of storing a liquid droplet of up to 1000 fL (femtoliters). The container part is made of a recess provided in at least one of a first member and a second member which are bonded to each other. According to Patent Literature 1, an enzyme reaction is carried out in the liquid droplet. With such a configuration, the enzyme reaction can be performed with a high concentration of the reaction products, even if the number of molecules of the reaction products is quite small. Thus, it is possible to detect an activity of one molecule of enzyme.

[0005] Non-Patent Literature 1 discloses a method for carrying out a single-molecule enzyme assay by use of an array where a liquid droplet is covered with oil, in a femtoliter-order, and accessible directly from the outside. This array includes a hydrophilic region pattern made of a hydrophilic surface on which a hydrophobic region having a height of 17 nm is provided.

[0006] Non-Patent Literature 2 discloses a method for detecting a protein by a single-molecule Enzyme-Linked ImmunoSorbent Assay (ELISA). According to this method, a very small amount of proteins are captured by minute

beads covered with protein-specific antibodies, and complexes of the beads and the proteins are fluorescence-labeled. Then, beads including the complexes are introduced into a reaction chamber by centrifugal force. Thereafter, the number of beads having captured the proteins is counted. In this manner, the proteins are quantitatively assayed.

CITATION LIST

Patent Literatures

- [0007]** [Patent Literature 1]
[0008] Japanese Patent Application Publication, Tokukai, No. 2004-309405 A (Publication Date: Nov. 4, 2004)

Non-Patent Literatures

- [0009]** [Non-Patent Literature 1]
[0010] S. Sakakihara et al., Lab Chip, 2010, 10, 3355-3362
[0011] [Non-Patent Literature 2]
[0012] David M Rissin et al., Nature Biotechnology: doi: 10.1038/nbt.1641

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

Technical Problem

[0013] In order to detect, e.g., disease markers of low concentration for early detection of diseases, infectious diseases, and the like, there is a demand for biosensing techniques developed to have higher sensitivities. For example, in a case where one million cancer cells included in a tumor having a volume of 1 mm³ secrete marker proteins (100 molecules per cell) into 5-liter blood, a concentration of the proteins in the blood is approximately 30 aM (i.e., 30×10⁻¹⁸ M). A technique capable of detecting target molecules of such quite low concentration is needed.

[0014] A possible method for detecting such the target molecules may be the one for detecting the target molecules by the above-mentioned single-molecule enzyme assay at a single molecule level sensitivity. Specifically, such the method is carried out by (i) sealing the target molecule specifically into a femtoliter-order liquid droplet (very small liquid droplet), (ii) linking the target molecule to a substance such as an enzyme-labeled antibody, and (iii) detecting an activity of the enzyme labeling the antibody in the above-mentioned manner. The sealing of the target molecule specifically into the very small liquid droplet may be carried out by a method using, e.g., a bead labeled with a substance such as another antibody for specifically binding to the target molecule. In this method, after the bead is bound to the target molecule, the bead is sealed into the very small solution droplet.

[0015] Incidentally, in order to efficiently detect target molecules which are contained in a solution only in a very small amount e.g., approximately 30 aM target molecules as described above, it is necessary to prepare a large number of very small liquid droplet arrays, as many as approximately one million, and to cause the arrays to capture the beads.

[0016] However, according to the method disclosed by Non-Patent Literature 2, the beads need to be introduced into arrays by strong centrifugal force, and therefore much time and efforts are required. Further, the number of arrays used in the method of Non-Patent Literature 2 is approximately fifty thousand. Therefore, the method of Non-Patent Litera-

ture 2 is quite difficult to be applied to the case requiring approximately one million arrays. Thus, with the method of Non-Patent Literature 2, it is difficult to efficiently seal a large number of beads into the arrays. Incidentally, none of Patent Literature 1 and Non-Patent Literature 1 discloses any method for solving such the problem.

[0017] In view of this, the present invention has an object to provide a technique for efficiently sealing a large number of beads into an array.

Solution to Problem

[0018] In order to attain the above object, a method of the present invention for sealing beads includes: (i) a step of introducing a hydrophilic solvent containing beads into a space between (a) a lower layer section including a plurality of receptacles each of which is capable of storing only one of the beads and which are separated from each other by a side wall having a hydrophobic upper surface and (b) an upper layer section facing a surface of the lower layer section on which surface the plurality of receptacles are provided; and (ii) a step of introducing a hydrophobic solvent into the space, the step (ii) being carried out after the step (i).

[0019] In order to attain the above object, an array of the present invention includes: a lower layer section provided with a plurality of receptacles being separated from each other by a side wall having a hydrophobic upper surface; and an upper layer section facing, via a space, a surface of the lower layer section on which surface the plurality of receptacles are provided.

Advantageous Effects of Invention

[0020] The use of the method for sealing beads of the present invention makes it possible to efficiently seal a large number of beads into an array, thereby contributing to a technique by which target molecules of low concentration are detectable with high sensitivity.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0021] (a) through (e) of FIG. 1 are views schematically illustrating a method for sealing beads according to the present invention, and show lateral cross-sectional views of an array 1.

[0022] FIG. 2 is a view schematically illustrating one embodiment of a target molecule detection device according to the present invention.

[0023] FIG. 3 shows a fluorescence image of an array into which beads were sealed in one example of the present invention.

[0024] FIG. 4 is a graph showing fluorescence intensities observed when target molecules were detected by a conventional method.

[0025] (a) through (f) of FIG. 5 show microscopic images of arrays into which beads were sealed in another example of the present invention.

[0026] FIG. 6 shows a graph illustrating a relationship, observed in said another example of the present invention, between (i) a concentration of streptavidin and (ii) a ratio of the number of beads having captured streptavidin with respect to the number of beads stored in the array.

[0027] FIG. 7 is a view for explaining a method for preparing a hydrophilic-hydrophobic patterned glass according to an example of the present invention.

[0028] FIG. 8 is a view illustrating (i) a bead trapping efficiency found in a case involving the use of an array having a flow cell structure (Example 3) and (ii) a bead trapping efficiency found in a case involving the use of an array not having the flow cell structure (Comparative Example 2).

DESCRIPTION OF EMBODIMENTS

[0029] The following describes one embodiment of the present invention in details.

[0030] [Method for Sealing Beads]

[0031] With reference to (a) through (e) of FIG. 1, the following describes a method for sealing beads according to the present embodiment. (a) through (e) of FIG. 1 are views schematically illustrating a method for sealing beads according to the present invention, and show lateral cross-sectional views of an array 1.

[0032] The present embodiment deals with a case where beads 41 and 41' are sealed into the array 1 including a lower layer section 10 and an upper layer section 20. The lower layer section 10 includes a plurality of receptacles 13 each of which is capable of storing only one of the beads 41 and 41' and which are separated from each other by a side wall 12 having a hydrophobic upper surface. Further, the upper layer section 20 faces a surface of the lower layer section 10 on which surface the receptacles 13 are provided.

[0033] Preferably, the beads have an average particle diameter of 1 μm to 4 μm . With this, the beads can be efficiently sealed into the array, and the array can achieve high density. Note that the term "average particle diameter" herein refers to a value obtained as a result of measurement of the beads by means of electron microscope observation or dynamic light scattering.

[0034] The present embodiment describes, but is not particularly limited to, a case of using beads specifically capturing target molecules. In the present embodiment, the beads to be sealed are a mixture of the beads 41, which have not captured the target molecules yet, and the beads 41', which have captured the target molecules.

[0035] For example, it is possible to use, as the beads specifically capturing the target molecules, beads being bound to a molecule for specifically capturing the target molecule. The molecule for specifically capturing the target molecule may be bound to a modification group on a surface of the bead, e.g., via a linker. For example, the present invention may be configured such that the molecule for specifically capturing the target molecule is covalently bonded to an amino group on a surface of an amino group-modified bead via a crosslinker having N-hydroxy-succinimide and/or the like.

[0036] The "target molecule" refers to a molecule which is to be detected (targeted molecule). Specifically, the "target molecule" herein refers to a molecule which is to be detected by causing the bead to capture the molecule. Examples of the target molecule encompass (i) biomolecules such as a protein, a nucleic acid, and sugar and (ii) virus particles themselves.

[0037] The molecule for specifically capturing the target molecule (hereinafter, such molecule is also referred to as a "target capturing molecule") may be chosen according to the target molecule. Examples of the target capturing molecule encompass a protein, an antibody, and a nucleic acid. Preferably, one bead is bounded to hundred thousand or more target capturing molecules. For example, in a case

where the target capturing molecule is an antibody, the target capturing molecule has a dissociation constant in nM order or so. However, with the above-mentioned configuration, it is possible to cause the reaction between the beads and the target molecules with a sufficiently high concentration of the target capturing (for example, in a case where the concentration of the beads is 8×10^6 particles/mL, the concentration of the target capturing molecules is approximately 1 nM).

[0038] The method for sealing beads according to the present embodiment includes a step of beads introduction, a step of deaeration, and a step of hydrophobic solvent introduction. Each of these steps will be described in detail below.

[0039] (Step of Beads Introduction)

[0040] The following describes the step of beads introduction with reference to (a) and (b) of FIG. 1.

[0041] The step of beads introduction is a step of introducing a hydrophilic solvent **42** containing the beads **41** and **41'** into a space **30** between the lower layer section **10** and the upper layer section **20**. The hydrophilic solvent **42** may be introduced into the space **30** between the lower layer section **10** and the upper layer section **20** along a direction which is in parallel with surfaces of the lower layer section **10** and the upper layer section **20**, the surfaces of the lower layer section **10** and the upper layer section **20** facing each other. For example, the hydrophilic solvent **42** may be introduced into the space **30** via a through-hole (not shown) provided in at least one of the upper layer section **20** and the lower layer section **10**.

[0042] Preferably used as the hydrophilic solvent **42** is, for example, at least one selected from the group consisting of water, hydrophilic alcohol, hydrophilic ether, ketone, nitrile solvents, dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO), and N,N-dimethylformamide (DMF) or is a mixture including the at least one. Examples of hydrophilic alcohol encompass ethanol, methanol, propanol, and glycerin. Examples of hydrophilic ether encompass tetrahydrofuran, polyethylene oxide, and 1,4-dioxane. Examples of ketone encompass acetone and methyl ethyl ketone. Examples of the nitrile solvents encompass acetonitrile.

[0043] In addition to the beads **41** and **41'**, the hydrophilic solvent **42** may further include, e.g., a substance for specifically detecting the target molecule captured by any of the beads **41'**. Such the substance may be, for example, a fluorescent substrate which liberates a fluorescent material when decomposed by a certain enzyme bound to (i) the target molecule captured by any of the beads **41'** or (ii) a molecule specifically bound to the target molecule. Examples of the molecule specifically bound to the target molecule encompass a secondary antibody and a nucleic acid. Examples of the certain enzyme encompass β -galactosidase and peroxidase. Examples of the fluorescent substrate encompass fluorescein-di- β -galactopyranoside (FDG) and Amplex red (Registered Trademark).

[0044] (Step of Deaeration)

[0045] The following describes the step of deaeration with reference to (c) of FIG. 1.

[0046] The step of deaeration is a step of deaerating the space **30** between the lower layer section **10** and the upper layer section **20**, which is carried out after the step of beads introduction and before the step of hydrophobic solvent introduction. Preferably, the deaeration is carried out by, for example, a method of allowing the array **1** to stand still under reduced pressure. Specifically, the deaeration is car-

ried out by, for example, a method of allowing the array **1** to stand still in a vacuum desiccator of approximately 0.1 atm for approximately 30 seconds.

[0047] The step of deaeration is not essential for the present invention. However, carrying out the step of deaeration removes the air in the receptacles **13**, thereby making it possible to efficiently introduce into the receptacles **13** the hydrophilic solvent **42** containing the beads **41** and **41'**. This enables to efficiently seal the beads **41** and **41'** into the receptacles **13**. Therefore, it is preferable to carry out the step of deaeration.

[0048] (Step of Hydrophobic Solvent Introduction)

[0049] The following describes the step of hydrophobic solvent introduction with reference to (d) and (e) of FIG. 1.

[0050] The step of hydrophobic solvent introduction is a step of introducing a hydrophobic solvent **43** into the space **30** between the lower layer section **10** and the upper layer section **20**. The step of hydrophobic solvent introduction is carried out after the step of beads introduction, and preferably carried out after the step of deaeration.

[0051] The hydrophobic solvent **43** only needs to be a solvent that is difficult to be mixed with the hydrophilic solvent **42**, which is used in the step of beads introduction. Preferably used as the hydrophobic solvent **43** is, for example, at least one selected from the group consisting of saturated hydrocarbon, unsaturated hydrocarbon, aromatic hydrocarbon, silicone oil, perfluorocarbon, halogen solvents, and hydrophobic ionic liquid or is a mixture including the at least one. Examples of saturated hydrocarbon encompass alkane and cycloalkane. Examples of alkane encompass decane and hexadecane. Examples of unsaturated hydrocarbon encompass squalene. Examples of aromatic hydrocarbon encompass benzene and toluene. Examples of perfluorocarbon encompass Fluorinert (Registered Trademark) FC40 (available from SIGMA). Examples of the halogen solvents encompass chloroform, methylene chloride, and chlorobenzene. The hydrophobic ionic liquid denotes ionic liquid which is not dissociated at least in water. Examples of such the ionic liquid encompass 1-butyl-3-methylimidazolium hexafluorophosphate. The ionic liquid denotes a salt which is in the form of liquid at room temperature.

[0052] Carrying out the step of hydrophobic solvent introduction makes it possible to efficiently form, in the respective receptacles **13**, droplets (liquid droplets) covered with the hydrophobic solvent **43**. Also, carrying out the step of hydrophobic solvent introduction makes it possible to efficiently seal the beads **41** and **41'** into the droplets so that any one of the beads **41** and **41'** is stored in each of the droplets.

[0053] According to the present embodiment, the beads **41** and **41'** are introduced through the space **30** between the lower layer section **10** and the upper layer section **20**, thereby enabling highly-efficient sealing of any one of the beads into each of a large number of receptacles **13** which are provided in a large area (e.g., an area of 1 cm^2 or more).

[0054] The present embodiment enables to provide a large-area droplet array including a large number of receptacles. For example, even with an array including one million or more receptacles, it is possible to efficiently seal the beads **41** and **41'** into the receptacles so that any one of the beads **41** and **41'** is stored in each of the receptacles. Thus, with the present embodiment, it is possible to detect the target molecules with high sensitivity, thereby enabling to detect the target molecules of such a quite low concentration as approximately 0.1 aM.

[0055] [Method for Detecting Target Molecule]

[0056] Next, the following describes the method for detecting the target molecule according to the present embodiment.

[0057] The method for detecting the target molecule according to the present embodiment includes a step of reaction, a step of sealing beads, and a step of determination.

[0058] The present embodiment uses, as the beads, beads that specifically capture the target molecules. For example, each of such the beads may be the one having been bound to a molecule for specifically capturing the target molecule. Suitably used as the beads, the target molecule, and the molecule for specifically capturing the target molecule can be any of those exemplified in the descriptions for the method for sealing beads of the present embodiment.

[0059] The step of reaction is a step of reacting the beads with the target molecules. For example, the reaction between the beads and the target molecules can be carried out by mixing a solution containing the beads with a solution containing the target molecules.

[0060] The step of sealing beads is a step of carrying out the above-mentioned method for sealing beads by use of the beads which have been reacted with the target molecules in the step of reaction. Namely, the step of sealing beads is (i) a step including the step of beads introduction and the step of hydrophobic solvent introduction or (ii) a step including the step of beads introduction, the step of deaeration, and the step of hydrophobic solvent introduction. Note that descriptions of the step of beads introduction, the step of deaeration, and the step of hydrophobic solvent introduction are omitted here, since these steps can be carried out in the same manner as those described in the above section "Method for bead sealing".

[0061] The step of determination is a step of determining, after the step of sealing beads, whether or not each of the receptacles 13 contains any one of the beads 41' having captured the target molecules.

[0062] Suitable examples of the method of determining whether or not each of the receptacles 13 contains any one of the beads 41' having captured the target molecules encompass known molecular recognition reactions such as antigen-antibody reaction, streptavidin-biotin reaction, and complementary binding of nucleic acids. For example, this method can be a method of detecting a fluorescent material liberated from a fluorescent substrate when decomposed by a certain enzyme bound to (i) a target molecule or (ii) a molecule specifically bound to the target molecule. The detection of the fluorescent material is carried out by, for example, a method of determining a fluorescence intensity of each receptacle by use of, e.g., a fluorescence microscope or an image sensor.

[0063] In the step of determination, it is preferable to also determine whether each of the receptacles 13 contains any one of the beads 41 or any one of the beads 41'. The determination of whether each of the receptacles 13 contains any one of the beads 41 or any one of the beads 41' can be carried out by, for example, microscopic observation to determine the presence or absence of any one of the beads 41 or any one of the beads 41' in each of the receptacles 13. Alternatively, the determination of the presence or absence of any one of the beads 41 or any one of the beads 41' in each of the receptacles 13 can be carried out by a method of

detecting scattered light from the beads or a method of measuring an electric potential with a field-effect transistor (FET).

[0064] After the step of determination, based on (i) the number of receptacles 13 containing the beads 41 or the beads 41' and (ii) the number of receptacles 13 containing the beads 41' having captured the target molecules, it is possible to calculate a ratio of the number of beads having captured the target molecules with respect to the total number of beads. In this manner, it is possible to quantify a concentration of the target molecules.

[0065] According to the present embodiment, it is possible to provide a large-area droplet array including a large number of receptacles; further, even with an array including one million or more receptacles, it is possible to efficiently seal the beads 41 and 41' into the receptacles. Thus, with the present embodiment, it is possible to detect the target molecules with high sensitivity, thereby enabling to detect the target molecules of such a quite low concentration as approximately 0.1 aM.

[0066] [Array]

[0067] Next, the following describes a configuration of the array 1 of the present embodiment with reference to (a) of FIG. 1. The array 1 may be an array used in the method for sealing beads according to the present embodiment, or may be an array used in the method for detecting the target molecule according to the present embodiment.

[0068] The array 1 includes the lower layer section 10 and the upper layer section 20.

[0069] The lower layer section 10 includes a plate-like member 11 and the side wall 12 having a hydrophobic upper surface. The lower layer section 10 includes the plurality of receptacles 13 that are separated from each other by the side wall 12.

[0070] Preferably, the plate-like member 11 has a hydrophilic surface. The term "hydrophilic surface" refers to a surface whose affinity with a hydrophilic solvent is higher than that with a hydrophobic solvent. The plate-like member 11 only needs to be made from a solid material. For example, the plate-like member 11 can be made from glass, silicon, or a polymer resin.

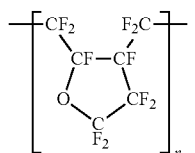
[0071] The side wall 12 is a structure that is provided on a surface of the plate-like member 11, preferably on the hydrophilic surface of the plate-like member 11, and is configured to separate the plurality of receptacles 13 from each other. The side wall 12 has the hydrophobic upper surface. The term "hydrophobic" herein is used as a synonym for "lipophilic", and denotes a nature whose affinity with a hydrophobic solvent is higher than that with a hydrophilic solvent.

[0072] Note that the side wall 12 needs to be configured such that its upper surface, i.e., its surface facing the upper layer section 20, is hydrophobic. Whereas, a lateral surface of the side wall 12, i.e., an inner wall of each of the receptacles 13, may be either hydrophobic or hydrophilic.

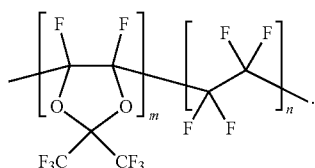
[0073] For example, the side wall 12 may be made of a hydrophilic structure and a hydrophobic layer which is formed on an upper surface of the hydrophilic structure. The hydrophilic structure may be made from, e.g., glass, silicon, or a polymer resin. The hydrophobic layer may be made from, e.g., a water repellent resin or a fluorocarbon polymer resin. Examples of the fluorocarbon polymer resin encompass amorphous fluorocarbon resin. The amorphous fluorocarbon resin is preferably used, because the amorphous

fluorocarbon resin has a high hydrophobic property and has a low toxicity to a biological sample.

[0074] Preferable examples of the amorphous fluorocarbon resin encompass at least one selected from CYTOP (Registered Trademark), TEFLON (Registered Trademark) AF2400, and TEFLON (Registered Trademark) AF1600. Among those, CYTOP (Registered Trademark) is most preferable, since it is easy to be microfabricated. CYTOP (Registered Trademark) has the following general formula:



TEFLON (Registered Trademark) AF2400 and TEFLON (Registered Trademark) AF1600 are poly[4,5-difluoro-2,2-bis(trifluoromethyl)-1,3-dioxole-co-tetrafluoroethylene], which has the following general formula:



In AF2400, the dioxole component is 87 mol %, and in AF1600, it is 65 mol %.

[0075] Alternatively, the side wall 12 may be made from a hydrophobic material. For example, the side wall 12 may be made from a fluorocarbon polymer resin or a paraxylene polymer resin. Examples of the fluorocarbon polymer resin encompass an amorphous fluorocarbon resin. Preferably used as the amorphous fluorocarbon resin is any of those exemplified above.

[0076] The side wall 12 only needs to have such a configuration that the plurality of receptacles 13 are provided on the plate-like member 11. For example, the side wall 12 may be a plate-like structure parts of which corresponding to the receptacles 13 are holes.

[0077] A height (i.e., a thickness in a vertical direction) of the side wall 12 measured from the surface of the plate-like member 11 only needs to be designed so that one of the beads 41 and 41' contained in one of the receptacles 13 would not be discharged therefrom during the later-described step of hydrophobic solvent introduction. For example, the height of the side wall 12 may be designed so that most part of, preferably the whole part of, one of the beads 41 and 41' contained in one of the receptacles 13 is positioned lower than the upper surface of the side wall 12.

[0078] In order to efficiently store the beads 41 and 41' in the receptacles 13, the height of the side wall 12 is preferably equal to or greater than the average particle diameter of the beads 41 and 41'. Further, in order that only one of the beads 41 and 41' is stored in one of the receptacles 13, the height of the side wall 12 is preferably equal to or smaller than 1.5 times the average particle diameter of the beads 41 and 41'.

[0079] Each of the plurality of receptacles 13 is a recess capable of storing only one of the beads 41 and 41', and the plurality of receptacles 13 are separated from each other by the side wall 12. Each of the receptacles 13 has a bottom surface which is a part of the surface of the plate-like member 11, and the bottom surface is hydrophilic.

[0080] The receptacles 13 can have any shape or size, as long as the shape or size allows each of the receptacles 13 to store only one of the beads 41 and 41' therein. A region surrounded by the bottom surface and the lateral surface of each of the receptacles 13 may be shaped in, e.g., a circular cylinder or a rectangular column.

[0081] A width "A" of each of the receptacles 13 in a horizontal direction (e.g., in a case where a cross section of each receptacle 13 when seen in the horizontal direction is shaped in a circle, the width "A" is a diameter of the circle; in a case where the cross section of each receptacle 13 when seen in the horizontal direction is shaped in a square, the width "A" is a length of one side of the square) only needs to be larger than the average particle diameter of the beads 41 and 41'. Preferably, the width "A" is 1.5 to 2 times larger than the average particle diameter of the beads 41 and 41', for example. In the present embodiment, each of the receptacles 13 has a depth equal to the height of the side wall 12. In order to efficiently store the beads in the receptacles, the depth of each of the receptacles of the present invention is preferably equal to or greater than the average particle diameter of the beads. Further, in order that only one of the beads is stored in one of the receptacles, the depth of each of the receptacles of the present invention is preferably equal to or smaller than 1.5 times the average particle diameter of the beads.

[0082] According to the present embodiment, each of the receptacles 13 has the hydrophilic bottom surface, and the side wall 12 has the hydrophobic upper surface. This makes it possible to efficiently introduce the hydrophilic solvent 42 containing the beads 41 and 41' into the receptacles 13 in the later-described step of beads introduction, and to prevent the hydrophobic solvent 43 from entering the receptacles 13 in the later-described step of hydrophobic solvent introduction. With this, the receptacles 13 storing the liquid droplets containing the beads 41 and 41' can be hermetically sealed with the hydrophobic solvent in an efficient manner.

[0083] The upper layer section 20 includes a plate-like member 21 and a hydrophobic layer 22. The hydrophobic layer 22 is provided on a surface of the plate-like member 21 which surface faces the lower layer section 10. The plate-like member 21 is made from, e.g., glass, silicon, or a polymer resin. The hydrophobic layer 22 is made from, e.g., a water repellent resin or a fluorocarbon polymer resin. Examples of the fluorocarbon polymer resin encompass amorphous fluorocarbon resin.

[0084] The upper layer section 20 faces, via the space 30, the surface of the lower layer section 10 on which surface the receptacles 13 are provided. Namely, the space 30 exists between the side wall 12 and the hydrophobic layer 22. The space 30 serves as a flow path. Thus, the array 1 is configured to have a flow cell structure.

[0085] The space 30 can be used as the flow path for allowing a fluid to flow between the lower layer section 10 and the upper layer section 20 in a direction in parallel with the surfaces of the lower layer section 10 and the upper layer section 20, the surfaces of the lower layer section 10 and the upper layer section 20 facing each other.

[0086] A distance between (i) the upper surface of the side wall 12 and (ii) the hydrophobic layer 22 the plate-like member 21, i.e., a width of the space 30 in the vertical direction only needs to be larger than the average particle diameter of the beads 41 and 41', and is preferably 10 μm to 150 μm .

[0087] The lower layer section 10 or the upper layer section 20 may be provided with the through-hole (not shown) through which the fluid is introduced into the space 30. For example, the lower layer section 10 may have a region provided with the receptacles 13 and a region provided with no receptacles 13. Further, the lower layer section 10 may have the through-hole in the region provided with no receptacles 13; alternatively, the upper layer section 20 may have the through-hole in a region facing the region of the lower layer section 10 provided with no receptacles 13.

[0088] According to the present embodiment, an upper side of the space 30 corresponds to the surface of the hydrophobic layer 22, and a lower side of the space 30 corresponds to the upper surface of the side wall 12 and the receptacles 13. Thus, except for parts of the space 30 corresponding to the bottom surfaces of the receptacles 13, the entire space 30 has a hydrophobic property. This configuration makes it possible to efficiently introduce the hydrophilic solvent 42 containing the beads 41 and 41' into the receptacles 13 in the later-described step of beads introduction. Further, this configuration prevents the hydrophobic solvent 43 from entering the receptacles 13 in the later-described step of hydrophobic solvent introduction. Thus, by introducing the hydrophobic solvent 43 into the space 30, it is possible to efficiently form, in each of the receptacles 13, a droplet into which any one of the beads 41 and 41' is sealed.

[0089] The array 1 of the present embodiment may be, for example, an array including one million or more receptacles. Even with the array having such a large area, the use of the method for sealing beads of the present embodiment or the method for detecting the target molecule of the present embodiment makes it possible to efficiently seal the beads into the receptacles so that any one of the beads is stored in each of the receptacles. Thus, according to the present embodiment, it is possible to detect the target molecules with high sensitivity, thereby enabling to provide an array allowing detection of target molecules of such a quite low concentration as approximately 0.1 aM.

[0090] [Kit]

[0091] Next, the following describes a configuration of a kit of the present embodiment.

[0092] The kit of the present embodiment includes at least the array 1 and the beads 41. Preferably used as the array 1 is the array 1 having the above-described configuration. Each of the receptacles 13 in the array 1 is configured to be capable of storing only one of the beads 41 included in this kit.

[0093] Each of the beads 41 included in this kit may be the one specifically capturing the target molecule. For example, each of the beads 41 included in this kit may be the one having been bound to a molecule for specifically binding to the target molecule. Suitably used as the target molecule and the molecule for specifically binding to the target molecule can be any of those mentioned above.

[0094] This kit may further include a substance for specifically detecting the target molecule. Preferably used as the substance for specifically detecting the target molecule may

be any of those mentioned above. Furthermore, the kit may further include, e.g., a water-soluble solvent and/or a hydrophobic solvent.

[0095] [Target Molecule Detection Device]

[0096] Next, the following describes a target molecule detection device 50 of the present embodiment with reference to FIG. 2. FIG. 2 is a view schematically illustrating one embodiment of a target molecule detection device according to the present invention.

[0097] The target molecule detection device 50 of the present embodiment includes the array 1, an image sensor 51, and a light source 52. Preferably used as the array 1 may be the one having the above-described configuration, and therefore explanations of the array 1 are omitted here.

[0098] The image sensor 51 is a sensor for detecting light emitted by each of the receptacles 13 when the beads having captured the target molecules are stored in the receptacles 13. For example, the image sensor 51 may be a sensor for detecting fluorescence emitted by a fluorescent substrate when decomposed by a certain enzyme bound to (i) the target molecule or (ii) a molecule specifically bound to the target molecule. Suitably used as the image sensor 51 can be, for example, a CMOS image sensor.

[0099] The light source 52 is a light source for emitting light to the array 1. In FIG. 2, the light source 52 is provided above the array 1. However, the present invention is not particularly limited to this. Alternatively, the light source 52 may be the one emitting light to a lateral side of the array 1, for example.

[0100] Between the array 1 and the image sensor 51, an interference filter and/or a light guide array may be provided, for example. Further, between the light source 52 and the array 1, an excitation filter may be provided, for example.

[0101] According to the present embodiment, the array 1 and the image sensor 51 are directly connected with each other. This makes it possible to easily determine, without use of other device such as a microscope, whether or not any one of the beads having captured the target molecules is stored in each of the receptacles 13. This enables to carry out easy and high-speed detection of whether or not any one of the beads captured the target molecules is stored in each of the receptacles 13, and to provide the target molecule detection device at an affordable price.

[0102] The present application encompasses the following inventions.

[0103] A method for sealing beads of the present invention includes: (i) a step of introducing a hydrophilic solvent containing beads into a space between (a) a lower layer section including a plurality of receptacles each of which is capable of storing only one of the beads and which are separated from each other by a side wall having a hydrophobic upper surface and (b) an upper layer section facing a surface of the lower layer section on which surface the plurality of receptacles are provided; and (ii) a step of introducing a hydrophobic solvent into the space, the step (ii) being carried out after the step (i).

[0104] Preferably, the method for sealing beads of the present invention further includes (iii) a step of deaerating the space, the step (iii) being carried out after the step (i) and before the step (ii).

[0105] Preferably, according to the method for sealing beads of the present invention, the hydrophilic solvent is at least one selected from the group consisting of water,

hydrophilic alcohol, hydrophilic ether, ketone, nitrile solvents, dimethyl sulfoxide, and N,N-dimethylformamide, or is a mixture including the at least one.

[0106] Preferably, according to the method for sealing beads of the present invention, the hydrophobic solvent is at least one selected from the group consisting of saturated hydrocarbon, unsaturated hydrocarbon, aromatic hydrocarbon, silicone oil, perfluorocarbon, halogen solvents, and hydrophobic ionic liquid, or is a mixture including the at least one.

[0107] In order to attain the foregoing object, a method for detecting a target molecule of the present invention includes: (i) a step of reacting beads specifically capturing target molecules with the target molecules; (ii) a step of carrying out, by use of the beads, any of the above-mentioned methods for sealing beads, the step (ii) being carried out after the step (i); and (iii) a step of determining whether or not any one of beads having captured the target molecules is stored in each of the plurality of receptacles, the step (iii) being carried out after the step (ii).

[0108] Preferably, according to the method for detecting a target molecule of the present invention, the beads are such beads to which molecules specifically bindable to the target molecules are bound.

[0109] An array of the present invention includes: a lower layer section provided with a plurality of receptacles being separated from each other by a side wall having a hydrophobic upper surface; and an upper layer section facing, via a space, a surface of the lower layer section on which surface the plurality of receptacles are provided.

[0110] Preferably, according to the array of the present invention, each of the plurality of receptacles has a hydrophilic bottom surface.

[0111] Preferably, according to the array of the present invention, the upper layer section has a hydrophobic surface facing the lower layer section.

[0112] Preferably, according to the array of the present invention, at least one of the upper layer section and the lower layer section has a through-hole via which a fluid is introduced into the space.

[0113] In order to attain the foregoing object, a kit of the present invention includes: any of the above-mentioned arrays; and beads, each of the plurality of receptacles being capable of storing only one of the beads.

[0114] In order to attain the foregoing object, a target molecule detection device of the present invention includes: any one of the above-mentioned arrays; and an image sensor for detecting light being emitted from each of the plurality of receptacles in a case where beads having captured target molecules are stored in the plurality of receptacles.

[0115] The present invention is not limited to the description of the embodiments above, but may be altered by a skilled person within the scope of the claims. The embodiments of the present invention are described in further detail via the following Examples. Needless to say, the present invention is not limited to these Examples. The invention being thus described, it will be clear that the same may be varied in many ways.

EXAMPLES

[0116] The following will describe materials and methods that were used in Examples.

[0117] (Materials)

[0118] In the Examples, used as the target molecule was streptavidin (purchased from SIGMA) labeled with β -galactosidase (hereinafter, also simply referred to as "streptavidin"). Further, used as the beads were biotinylated beads prepared by biotinylating amino beads having an average particle diameter of 3 μ m (material: polystyrene; micromer-NH₂-3 μ m; purchased from Micromod).

[0119] (Preparation of Biotinylated Beads)

[0120] By the following method, amino groups of amino beads were reacted with NHS-PEO4-Biotin, so that the amino beads were biotinylated.

[0121] First, 750 μ L of buffer A (100 mM phosphoric acid buffer, pH 8.0) was added to 250 μ L of amino beads.

[0122] Next, the resultant was subjected to centrifugation at 10000 rpm at 4° C. for 10 minutes, so that the amino beads were gathered up and collected. Then, the amino beads were suspended in 500 μ L of buffer A (suspension A). Thereafter, 50 μ L of NHS-PEO4-Biotin (2 pg/50 μ L DMSO) was added to the suspension A, and then the amino beads and NHS-PEO4-Biotin were reacted under gentle stirring at 25° C. for at least 3 hours (the tube was rotated end-over-end for mixing).

[0123] Next, biotinylated beads thus obtained were washed. The mixture was subjected to centrifugation at 10000 rpm at 4° C. for 10 minutes, so that the biotinylated beads were gathered up and collected. Then, an aqueous phase therein was removed by a Pipetman pipette. To the resulting precipitate of the biotinylated beads, 1 mL of buffer A was added so that the precipitate of the biotinylated beads was suspended. This process was repeated six times, so that unreacted NHS-PEO4-Biotin was removed. Then, the resultant was suspended in 500 μ L of buffer A (suspension B). The suspension B was preserved at 4° C.

[0124] Next, a concentration of the biotinylated beads in the suspension B was measured. The number of biotinylated beads in a certain volume was counted by use of a hemacytometer, so that the concentration of the biotinylated beads was found (approximately 3.0×10^8 beads/mL). In order that the number of biotinylated beads was easily counted, the counting was carried out after the suspension B was diluted by the buffer A by approximately 5-fold, for example.

[0125] By the above-mentioned method, the biotinylated beads were obtained.

[0126] (Capturing of Streptavidin)

[0127] Next, by the following method, streptavidin was captured by use of the biotinylated beads.

[0128] First, the biotinylated beads were diluted (8×10^6 beads/500 μ L). Further, streptavidin labeled with β -galactosidase was diluted by the buffer B (100 mM phosphoric acid buffer, pH 8.0, containing 0.1% TWEEN20 (detergent)) so that a concentration of streptavidin became two times higher than a target concentration (total amount: 500 μ L).

[0129] Then, 500 μ L of the biotinylated beads and 500 μ L of streptavidin thus diluted were mixed together in a tube (total amount: 1 mL). The tube was shaken vertically in a gentle manner, so that reaction between the biotinylated beads and streptavidin was carried out at 25° C. for 30 minutes.

[0130] Next, the resultant was subjected to centrifugation at 10000 rpm at 4° C. for 10 minutes, so that the beads after the reaction (a mixture of (i) complexes of streptavidin and the biotinylated beads and (ii) unreacted biotinylated beads) were gathered up and collected. Then, an aqueous phase therein was removed by a Pipetman pipette. To the resulting

precipitate of beads, 1 mL of buffer A was added and suspended. This process was repeated four times for washing, so that unreacted target molecules were removed.

[0131] Next, to the precipitate of the beads after the washing, 15 μ L of buffer C (100 mM phosphoric acid buffer, pH 7.5, 1 mM $MgCl_2$) was added for suspension. An ultimate concentration of the beads was approximately 6.5×10^6 beads/15- μ L buffer C.

[0132] (Production of Array)

[0133] Next, by the following method, an array having the same flow cell structure as that of the array **1** shown in (a) through (e) of FIG. **1** was produced. In the following descriptions, members having the same functions as those in the array **1** are given the same reference signs.

[0134] First, a hydrophilic-hydrophobic patterned glass (lower layer section **10**) and an upper side glass (upper layer section **20**) (height: 24 mm \times width: 26 mm \times depth: 5 mm, SiO_2 , with a through-hole having a diameter of 1 mm) were prepared.

[0135] (Preparation of Hydrophilic-Hydrophobic Patterned Glass)

[0136] With reference to FIG. **7**, the following describes a specific method for preparing the hydrophilic-hydrophobic patterned glass. FIG. **7** is a view for explaining a method for preparing a hydrophilic-hydrophobic patterned glass according to an example of the present invention.

[0137] According to the present embodiment, photolithography and dry etching were carried out so that a hydrophilic-hydrophobic pattern was formed on glass. In order to form the hydrophilic-hydrophobic pattern, three steps including a step of CYTOP (Registered Trademark) application, a step of photolithography, and a step of etching and resist removal were carried out.

[0138] In the step of CYTOP (Registered Trademark) application, CYTOP (Registered Trademark) CTL-809 (product name; available from ASAHI GLASS) was first applied onto glass of 24 mm (height) \times 32 mm (width) (product name: NEO MICRO COVER GLASS Thickness No. 1; available from MATSUNAMI) (plate-like member **11**), so that a hydrophobic resin layer **61** was formed.

[0139] Next, in the step of photolithography, a positive photoresist **62** (product name: AZ-4903; available from AZ Electronic Materials USA) was applied onto the hydrophobic resin layer **61**. Next, via a photomask **63** having a desired pattern, the resultant was exposed to UV emitted from above, so that an alkaline development process was carried out. As a result of the development process, the photoresist **62** was dissolved only in parts irradiated with UV, so that parts of the hydrophobic resin layer **61** which parts faced the parts of the photoresist **62** irradiated with UV were exposed.

[0140] After that, in the step of etching and resist removal, the glass was etched by O_2 plasma via a partially dissolved photoresist **62'**, so that the parts of the resin layer **61** were removed. As a result, a hydrophobic side wall **12** was obtained. Finally, the photoresist **62'** was dissolved by an organic solvent. Thus, the hydrophilic-hydrophobic pattern was obtained.

[0141] Further detailed procedures for the above process are described below. The reference numerals (1) through (23) in FIG. **7** correspond to (1) through (23) below, respectively.

[0142] <Step of CYTOP (Registered Trademark) Application (i.e., Preparation of CYTOP (Registered Trademark) Layer Having Film Thickness of Approximately 3.3 μ m to 3.5 μ m by the Following Procedures)>

[0143] (1) First, glass (plate-like member **11**) was washed and CYTOP (Registered Trademark) CTL-809 was applied onto the glass.

[0144] (2) Next, the glass was immersed in 10N KOH overnight.

[0145] (3) The cover glass having been immersed in KOH was washed with deionized water ten or more times.

[0146] (4) The glass was dried with a hot plate at 180° C.

[0147] (5) The glass thus dried was cooled to room temperature.

[0148] (6) Approximately 70 μ L of CYTOP (Registered Trademark) CTL-809 was poured onto the glass.

[0149] (7) Spin-coating was carried out according to the following program A:

[0150] [Program A]

Slope: 5 seconds

500 rpm: 10 seconds

Slope: 5 seconds

2000 rpm: 30 seconds

Slope: 5 seconds

End

[0151] (8) The glass was baked on the hot plate at 180° C. for an hour.

[0152] By repeating the above procedures (6) through (8) four times, a hydrophobic resin layer **61** having a depth of 3.3 μ m to 3.5 μ m was obtained.

[0153] <Step of Photolithography>

[0154] Next, photolithography was carried out.

[0155] (9) Onto the resin layer **61** prepared by the step of CYTOP (Registered Trademark) application, a positive photoresist **62** (AZ-4903) was poured in such an amount that the poured positive photoresist **62** spread on the glass so as to be in a diameter of approximately 8 mm.

[0156] (10) Spin-coating was carried out according to the following program B:

[0157] [Program B]

Slope: 5 seconds

500 rpm: 10 seconds

Slope: 5 seconds

4000 rpm: 60 seconds

Slope: 5 seconds

End

[0158] (11) The photoresist remaining on an edge of the glass was wiped out with a piece of gauze dampened with 100% EtOH.

[0159] (12) The glass was baked at 55° C. for 3 minutes.

[0160] (13) The glass was baked at 110° C. for 5 minutes.

[0161] (14) A photomask **63** was washed with acetone, and then the photomask **63** was set in a mask aligner (available from SAN-EI ELECTORIC).

[0162] (15) The glass to which the photoresist **62** was applied was set on a sample table of the mask aligner, and the sample table was lifted up, so that the glass and the photomask **63** were brought into contact with each other.

[0163] (16) The glass thus brought into contact with the photomask **63** was irradiated with UV for 35 seconds (power: 256).

[0164] (17) The glass was immersed in AZ Developer (available from AZ Electronic Materials USA) for 5 minutes or more for development.

[0165] (18) The glass was rinsed with MilliQ (distilled water) for approximately 10 minutes.

[0166] <Step of Etching and Resist Removal>

[0167] Subsequently, etching and removal of the resist were carried out.

[0168] (19) The glass was subjected to O₂ plasma etching by use of RIE-10NR (available from Samco) under certain process conditions (O₂: 50 sccm, pressure: 10 Pa, power: 50 W, time: 30 min.).

[0169] (20) The glass having been subjected to the etching was immersed in acetone, and then the glass was sonicated for 15 minutes.

[0170] (21) Acetone was exchanged for new one, and then the glass was sonicated again for 15 minutes.

[0171] (22) The glass was sonicated in EtOH for 15 minutes.

[0172] (23) The glass was washed with MilliQ (distilled water).

[0173] In the above-described method, a plurality of wells (receptacles 13) were formed on the glass. A region surrounded by the bottom surface and the lateral surface of each of the wells was shaped in a circular cylinder. A cross section of each well in the horizontal direction was shaped in a circle having a diameter of 5 μm. A height of the side wall, by which the wells were partitioned, was approximately 3.3 μm to 3.5 μm. Further, a distance "B", by which two adjacent wells were separated from each other, was 5 μm.

[0174] (Preparation of Upper Side Glass)

[0175] In the following method, an upper side glass was prepared. In order to prepare the upper side glass, such glass was used that has a thickness of 5 mm and a through-hole having a diameter of 1 mm. One side of this glass was covered with approximately 70 μL of CYTOP (Registered Trademark) CTL-809 (product name; available from ASAHI GLASS). Then, spin-coating was carried out according to the following program C:

[0176] [Program C]

Slope: 5 seconds

500 rpm: 10 seconds

Slope: 5 seconds

2000 rpm: 30 seconds

Slope: 5 seconds

End

[0177] Thereafter, the glass was baked on a hot plate at 180° C. for an hour.

[0178] In the above-described method, an upper side glass having one side provided with a hydrophobic layer of a thickness of 1 μm was prepared.

[0179] (Bonding of Hydrophilic-Hydrophobic Patterned Glass and Upper Side Glass)

[0180] Next, high vacuum grease (available from DOW CORNING TORAY) was applied to a piece of backing paper of Parafilm (available from Peckiney Plastic Packaging), and then the piece of backing paper of Parafilm was attached onto a part of the hydrophilic-hydrophobic patterned glass, the part being on a side on which the hydrophilic-hydrophobic pattern was formed, and the part not having the hydrophilic-hydrophobic pattern. The upper side glass was bonded to the side of the hydrophilic-hydrophobic patterned glass on which side the hydrophilic-hydrophobic

pattern was formed, in such a manner that the coating agent-coated side of the upper side glass faced the hydrophilic-hydrophobic patterned glass.

[0181] Consequently, a space was made between the hydrophilic-hydrophobic patterned glass and the upper side glass. A width of this space in the vertical direction, i.e., a distance between (i) the upper surface of the side wall of the hydrophilic-hydrophobic patterned glass and (ii) the upper side glass was approximately 150 μm.

[0182] (Sealing of Beads into Droplets)

[0183] Next, in the following method, the beads having been reacted with streptavidin were sealed into droplets.

[0184] First, 50 mM fluorescein-di-β-galactopyranoside (FDG) (available from Marker Gene Technology)/DMSO was diluted with FDG buffer (100 mM KPi buffer (PH=7.5), 1 mM MgCl₂, 4 μL/mL 2-mercaptethanol), so that 4 mM FDG solution was prepared. Then, 15 μL of the beads (6.5×10⁶ beads/15-μL buffer C) and 15 μL of 4 mM FDG solution were mixed together, so that a beads solution was prepared.

[0185] Next, 30 μL of the beads solution was loaded into the flow path by a yellow tip via the through-hole of the upper side glass (see (a) and (b) of FIG. 1).

[0186] Next, in order to remove the air in the wells, deaeration was carried out for one minute (see (c) of FIG. 1). The deaeration was carried out in such a manner that the array was allowed to stand still in a vacuum desiccator of approximately 0.1 atm for approximately 30 seconds. After that, the array was left at rest for approximately 5 minutes, so that the beads were precipitated into the bottoms of the wells.

[0187] Thereafter, 200 μL to 1000 μL of Fluorinert (Registered Trademark) FC40 (available from SIGMA) was loaded into the flow path via the through-hole of the upper side glass (see (d) and (e) of FIG. 1).

[0188] As a result, an aqueous phase was trapped only in the wells, so that droplets were formed. Thus, the beads were sealed into the droplets.

Example 1

[0189] By the above-described method, biotinylated beads and 1 fM streptavidin were reacted with each other, and then the resultant was introduced into an array together with FDG, so that the beads were sealed into droplets, respectively. The array used in Example 1 was a 1.0 cm×1.0 cm array including a total of 1097600 receptacles, specifically, including a 20×20 (horizontally and vertically) matrix of subarrays each (i) having a size of 512 μm×512 μm and (ii) including 2744 receptacles. This array was observed with a fluorescence microscope (IX71 (available from OLYMPUS)).

[0190] FIG. 3 shows a fluorescence image of the array into which the beads were sealed in one example of the present invention. What is shown in FIG. 3 is one subarray. As shown in FIG. 3, some bright points were observed in the fluorescence image (138 bright points in one field). These bright points indicate positions of receptacles into which biotinylated beads having captured streptavidin were sealed. This shows that the use of the method of the present invention makes it possible to adequately detect 1 fM streptavidin.

Comparative Example 1

[0191] In a comparative example of the present invention, target molecules were detected by a conventional bulk measurement method.

[0192] 12.5 fM streptavidin, which is 12.5 times higher concentration than that (1 fM) in Example 1, was mixed with FDG, and the resultant was measured for fluorescence by a fluorescence spectrophotometer. Further, a control experiment was carried out in the same manner by use of 6.3 pM streptavidin, which is 500 times higher concentration than that of this comparative example.

[0193] FIG. 4 shows results of the comparative example and the control experiment. FIG. 4 is a graph showing fluorescence intensities observed when the target molecules were detected by the conventional method. In FIG. 4, a graph line "a" shows a result of the case involving use of 12.5 fM streptavidin, whereas a graph line "b" shows a result of the case involving use of 6.3 pM streptavidin.

[0194] As shown in FIG. 4, in the case where the conventional method was used, it was impossible to detect 12.5 fM streptavidin. This shows that 12.5 fM is lower than a detection limit of the conventional method.

Example 2

[0195] Next, biotinylated beads were reacted with streptavidin of five different concentrations (1 fM, 100 aM, 10 aM, 1 aM, and 0.1 aM), and then were introduced into arrays together with FDG, so that the beads were sealed into droplets, respectively. Each of the arrays used in Example 2 had the same configuration as that used in Example 1. Each of these arrays was observed in a bright field image and in a fluorescence image by a microscope.

[0196] (Detection Results)

[0197] (a) through (f) of FIG. 5 show microscopic images of the arrays into which the beads were sealed in another example of the present invention. Note that each of (a), (c), and (e) of FIG. 5 shows a bright field image of a respective one of subarrays, whereas each of (b), (d), and (f) of FIG. 5 shows a fluorescence image of a respective one of the subarrays shown in (a), (c), and (e) of FIG. 5. Further, (a) and (b) of FIG. 5 show the results obtained in the case involving the use of 1 fM streptavidin; (c) and (d) of FIG. 5 show the results obtained in the case involving the use of 100 aM streptavidin; and (e) and (f) of FIG. 5 show the results obtained in the case involving the use of 10 aM streptavidin.

[0198] In the case involving the use of 1 fM streptavidin, a total number of beads sealed into one subarray was 1735; among those beads, the number of beads having captured streptavidin was 138. In the case involving the use of 100 aM streptavidin, a total number of beads sealed into one subarray was 2008; among those beads, the number of beads having captured streptavidin was 6. In the case involving the use of 10 aM streptavidin, a total number of beads sealed into one subarray was 1360; among those beads, the number of beads having captured streptavidin was 1.

[0199] (Comparison Between Theoretical Value and Experimental Value)

[0200] Further, a theoretical value and an experimental value of a ratio (%) of the number of beads (active beads) having captured streptavidin with respect to the total number of beads were calculated for each of the streptavidin concentrations.

[0201] Calculated as the theoretical value was a ratio (%) of the number of streptavidin molecules with respect to the total number of beads used in the reaction with streptavidin. Whereas, calculated as the experimental value was a ratio (%) of the number of beads having captured streptavidin with respect to the number of beads stored in the array.

[0202] FIG. 6 shows a graph illustrating a relationship, observed in said another example of the present invention, between (i) a concentration of streptavidin and (ii) a ratio of the number of beads having captured streptavidin with respect to the number of beads stored in the array. In FIG. 6, a graph line "a" shows the theoretical values, a circular dot shows the experimental value, and a circle drawn with a dotted line shows averages of the experimental values (N=2 to 3). Further, a graph line "b" is a line by which averages of the experimental values were approximated.

[0203] As shown in FIG. 6, the theoretical values and the experimental values are almost the same as each other. This shows that the method of the present example has a high quantitative accuracy, and is capable of accurately measuring a concentration of target molecules. These results show that the method of the present example makes it possible to adequately detect even target molecules of 0.1 aM or so.

Example 3

[0204] By the above-described method, a beads solution (6.5×10^6 beads/30 μ L) was introduced (loaded) into the array having the flow cell structure prepared in Example 1, so that the beads were sealed (trapped) into droplets. Then, a trapping efficiency (i.e., a ratio (%) of the number of trapped beads with respect to the number of loaded beads) during this process was calculated.

[0205] A result of the calculation is shown in FIG. 8. FIG. 8 is a view illustrating (i) a bead trapping efficiency found in a case involving the use of the array having the flow cell structure (Example 3) and (ii) a bead trapping efficiency found in a case involving the use of an array not having the flow cell structure (Comparative Example 2).

Comparative Example 2

[0206] In this comparative example, the array not having the flow cell structure (i.e., the array made of the above-described hydrophilic-hydrophobic patterned glass only) was used for beads sealing (amino beads of $\Phi=3 \mu$ m; micromer-NH₂-3 μ m; available from micromod).

[0207] By the below-described method, beads were sealed into the hydrophilic-hydrophobic patterned glass by use of a beads solution which was diluted at the same concentration (2.2×10^8 beads/mL= 6.5×10^6 beads/30 μ L) as that used in the case involving the use of the array having the flow cell structure (Example 3).

[0208] (1) The beads were diluted at a concentration of 2.2×10^8 beads/mL with a buffer (100 mM KPi buffer (PH=7.5), 1 mM MgCl₂, 2 μ L/mL 2-mercaptoethanol).

[0209] (2) The hydrophilic-hydrophobic patterned glass (prepared by the above-mentioned method) was bonded to a bottom of a petri dish (35-mm petri dish, available from Becton Dickinson). An adhesive used therefor was Araldite AR-R30 (available from NICHIBAN).

[0210] (3) An upper surface of the hydrophilic-hydrophobic patterned glass was covered with 500 μ L of the beads solution.

[0211] (4) The resultant was subjected to deaeration, and then was incubated for 5 minutes.

[0212] (5) 2 mL of FC40 (Fluorinert (Registered Trademark) FC40, available from SIGMA) was loaded onto the hydrophilic-hydrophobic patterned glass, so that the beads were sealed thereinto.

[0213] (6) In order to prevent evaporation of the droplets, water was introduced thereonto so that an oil phase was covered with the water.

[0214] After that, the number of beads confined in the droplets was counted, and then a trapping efficiency (a ratio (%) of the number of trapped beads with respect to the number of loaded beads) was calculated.

[0215] Results of the calculations are shown in FIG. 8. As shown in FIG. 8, the trapping efficiency found in the case involving the use of the array having the flow cell structure was 25 or more times higher than that in the case involving the use of the array not having the flow cell structure. The reason for this is considered as follows: In the case involving the use of the array not having the flow cell structure, a distance in which the beads could scatter in a vertical direction was increased, which made it difficult for the beads to come closer to the substrate.

[0216] Further, in the case involving the use of the array not having the flow cell structure, the whole surface of the substrate of the array needs to be covered with the beads solution. This requires a large amount of beads solution (i.e., the beads solution whose amount is approximately 16 times larger than that used in the case involving the use of the array having the flow cell structure). Thus, the use of the array having the flow cell structure makes it possible to carry out sealing of beads with a small amount of beads solution.

INDUSTRIAL APPLICABILITY

[0217] The present invention is suitably applicable to a method for detecting target molecules of low concentration, an array therefor, a device therefor, and the like.

REFERENCE SIGNS LIST

- [0218] 1 Array
- [0219] 10 Lower layer section
- [0220] 20 Upper layer section
- [0221] 12 Side wall
- [0222] 13 Receptacle
- [0223] 30 Space
- [0224] 41, 41' Beads
- [0225] 42 Hydrophilic solvent
- [0226] 43 Hydrophobic solvent

1-12. (canceled)

13: A detecting method using a kit and a deaerating device,

wherein said kit comprises:

an array having a flow cell structure, said array including:

- a lower layer section provided with a plurality of receptacles being separated from each other by a side wall having a hydrophobic upper surface; and
- an upper layer section facing, via a space, a surface of the lower layer section on which surface the plurality of receptacles are provided;

beads;

a hydrophilic solvent; and

a hydrophobic solvent;

each of the plurality of receptacles is capable of storing only one of the beads; and

said space is used as a flow path for allowing a fluid to flow between the lower layer section and the upper layer section;

and

said deaerating device is set for removing air in the plurality of receptacles while keeping the hydrophilic solvent as it is in the plurality of receptacles; said kit and said deaerating device being used to carry out a method for sealing the beads, the method comprising the steps of:

(i) introducing the hydrophilic solvent containing the beads into the space between the lower layer section and the upper layer section;

(ii) deaerating to remove air in the plurality of receptacles while keeping the hydrophilic solvent as it is in the plurality of receptacles; and

(iii) introducing the hydrophobic solvent into the space to flow and to displace the hydrophilic solvent;

wherein step (ii) is carried out between step (i) and step (iii).

14: The detecting method according to claim 13, wherein each of the plurality of receptacles has a hydrophilic bottom surface.

15: The detecting method according to claim 13, wherein the upper layer section has a hydrophobic surface facing the lower layer section.

16: The detecting method according to claim 14, wherein the upper layer section has a hydrophobic surface facing the lower layer section.

17: The detecting method according to claim 13, wherein at least one of the upper layer section and the lower layer section has a through-hole via which a fluid is introduced into the space.

18: The detecting method according to claim 14, wherein at least one of the upper layer section and the lower layer section has a through-hole via which a fluid is introduced into the space.

19: The detecting method according to claim 15, wherein at least one of the upper layer section and the lower layer section has a through-hole via which a fluid is introduced into the space.

20: The detecting method according to claim 16, wherein at least one of the upper layer section and the lower layer section has a through-hole via which a fluid is introduced into the space.

21: The detecting method according to claim 13, wherein each of the plurality of receptacles is made by photolithography and dry etching.

22: The detecting method according to claim 13, wherein a nucleic acid is captured by the bead sealed in the plurality of receptacles.

23: The detecting method according to claim 13, wherein said side wall is made of an amorphous fluorocarbon resin.

24: The detecting method according to claim 13, wherein a width of said space in the vertical direction is from 10 μm to 150 μm .

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