



Article

# Second harmonic generation from phase-engineered metasurfaces of nanoprisms

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**Abstract:** Metasurfaces of gold (Au) nanoparticles on a SiO<sub>2</sub>-Si substrate were fabricated for the enhancement of second harmonic generation (SHG) using electron beam lithography and lift-off. Triangular Au nanoprisms which are non-centro-symmetric and support the second-order non-linearity were examined for SHG. The thickness of the SiO<sub>2</sub> spacer is shown to be an efficient parameter to spectrally tune to maximise SHG. Electrical field enhancement at the fundamental wavelength was shown to define the intensity of the second harmonics. Numerical modeling of light enhancement was verified by experimental measurements of SHG and reflectivity spectra at the normal incidence. At the plasmonic resonance, SHG is enhanced up to  $\sim 3.5 \times 10^3$  times for the optimised conditions.

**Keywords:** metasurfaces, second harmonic generation, phase control, finite difference time domain

## 1. Introduction

Energy up-conversion is important for very different fields: non-linear optics (NLO) and generation of higher laser harmonics, harvesting of long-wavelength, sub-bandgap energy light in solar cells, and photo-thermal excitation of neurons at the near-IR transparency window in tissue [1–3]. Creating efficient strategies for generation of second and higher harmonics of light using non-linear  $\chi^{(2)}$  and  $\chi^{(3)}$  response of metasurfaces is a recent and active line of research [4–8]. At the nanoscale, phase matching conditions that are required for efficient energy transfer from the fundamental wavelength  $\lambda$  into higher harmonic  $\lambda/2$  along the co-propagation direction is relaxed at the near-field, however, the efficiency of the second harmonic generation (SHG) is low. It can only be compensated by the field enhancement and geometrical factors of the nanoparticles. For example, an array of gold nano-bumps made by controlled ultra-short laser pulse fabrication showed up to  $\sim 10^2$  times stronger SHG as compared with flat film of gold [9]. The light field enhancement by nano-bumps at the fundamental wavelength was defining the enhancement of SHG. Recently, we showed that the phase control of light reflected and incident on a nanoparticle can enhance surface enhanced Raman scattering (SERS) [10,11]. This mechanism can provide an additional control for the phase sensitive SHG based on the  $\pi$  phase

change upon reflection when light travels through the low-to-high refractive index boundary and the 0 phase change for traversing the high-to-low interface. This mechanism based on Fresnel coefficients is explored in this study together with a propagation phase control by thickness of glass layer.

It was shown recently that optically induced magnetization of gold nanoparticles due to the inverse Faraday effect can be harnessed for non-reciprocal ultra-fast optical rotation [12]. Also, nanoparticles of Ag formed by annealing of the implanted  $\text{Ag}^+$  into a Pr:CaF<sub>2</sub> laser crystal host broadens and enhances spectral emission of Pr<sup>3+</sup> required for a shorter laser pulse generation [13]. The use of nanoparticles and nanostructures in optical control of light enhancement, propagation direction, reflection and NLO effects continues to evolve and widen.

Here, we demonstrate that phase control of light incident and reflected from the layered silica-Si structure allows controlled SHG enhancement. We fabricate and characterise metasurfaces made of plasmonic nanoparticles with a controlled-thickness silica spacer layer on top of a Si substrate. Numerical modeling by finite difference time domain (FDTD) was carried out to reveal characteristics of light field enhancement.

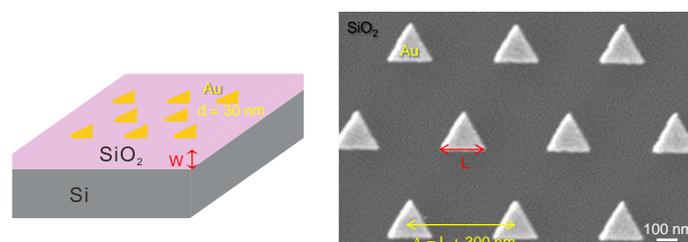
## 2. Experimental

### 2.1. Fabrication of metasurfaces

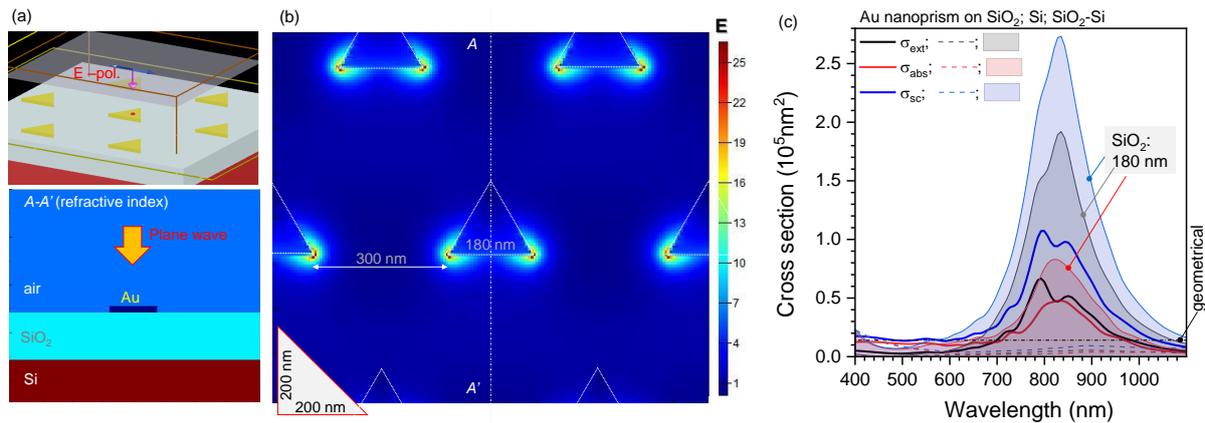
Samples of plasmonic metasurfaces were prepared by standard electron beam lithography (EBL) and lift-off (Fig. 1). A 30-nm-thick gold film was sputtered on a triangular lattice pattern in ZEP520 resist. A thin film of 3 nm of Cr was deposited first for better adhesion of gold. Si(100) wafers were used as a substrate with  $w = 200$  and 300 nm thermally-oxidised SiO<sub>2</sub>.

### 2.2. Characterisation of metasurfaces

Extinction - total losses due to absorption and scattering - was measured using a fiber-coupled tungsten-halogen lamp (SLS201L/M, Thorlabs) for the white light source. For the femtosecond laser radiation we used a mode-locked Ti:sapphire oscillator (Tsunami, Spectra-Physics). The oscillation wavelength was tunable between 730 and 920 nm, and the pulse width and repetition rate were  $\sim 100$  fs and 75 MHz, respectively. Second harmonic generation (SHG) was measured under wavelength tunable fs-laser irradiation of metasurfaces at normal incidence. Linear polarisation of the incident light at  $\lambda = 800$  nm wavelength was set either with  $\lambda/2$  or  $\lambda/4$ -plate. The former was used for rotating the polarisation direction of the linearly-polarised lights. The latter was used for converting the linearly-polarised light into the circularly-polarised lights. Polarisation of second harmonic was interrogated with a Glan-Taylor polariser for the linearly-polarised excitation. The combination of the second  $\lambda/4$ -plate and the Glan-Taylor polariser was used for analyzing the polarisation state of the SHG waves converted from the circularly-polarised excitation [14].



**Figure 1.** Schematic of the sample (left) and an SEM image of the triangle Au nanoparticles (right). The spacer of SiO<sub>2</sub> with width  $w = 200, 300$  nm was deposited on the Si substrate to control the E-field enhancement at the plasmonic Au triangular nanoparticles. The pattern was triangular with period  $\Lambda = L + s$  where separation between nanoparticles was  $s = 300$  nm and the side-length of the triangle was  $L = (120 - 220)$  nm changed in steps of 20 nm. Thickness of Au nanoparticles made by EBL and lift-off was  $d = 30$  nm.



**Figure 2.** (a) 3D FDTD setting for calculations under linearly polarised (along x-axis) E-field; plane wave illumination. Refractive index cross section (A-A'). (b) E-field enhancement cross section at the middle-plane of 30-nm-thick Au nano-particles (15 nm above SiO<sub>2</sub>). The incident field  $|E| = 1$ . The maximum field cross section shown is at  $\lambda = 825$  nm as in the experiment, see text for discussion. (c) Absorption, scattering and extinction cross sections  $\sigma_{ext} = \sigma_{abs} + \sigma_{sc}$  for the  $L = 180$  nm nanoprism on SiO<sub>2</sub> (solid lines; refractive index  $n = 1.4$ ), Si (dashed-lines), and SiO<sub>2</sub>( $w = 180$  nm)-on-Si; optical properties of Si were taken from the material database of Lumerical. The FDTD calculations were carried out using total-field scattered-field (TFSF) light source. Geometrical cross-section corresponds to the footprint area of the nanoprism  $S_{Au} = \frac{\sqrt{3}}{4}L^2 \approx 0.1403 \times 10^5 \text{ nm}^2$ .

59 The SHG signals were detected by liquid nitrogen-cooled CCD camera after being spectrally  
60 resolved by multichannel spectrograph (SpectraPro SP-500, Princeton Instruments).

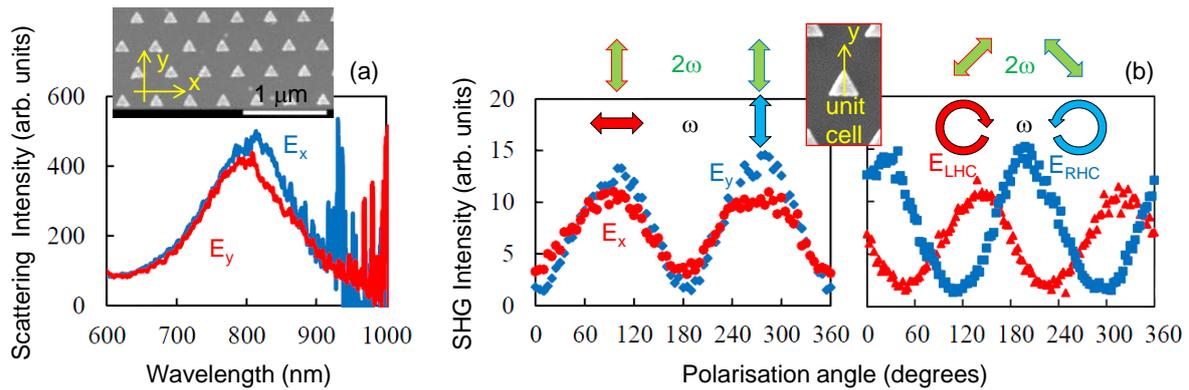
### 61 2.3. Numerical modeling

62 Numerical simulations of light field enhancement were carried out by finite difference time  
63 domain (FDTD) method using Lumerical FDTD Solutions. Permittivity of Si, SiO<sub>2</sub>, and Au were taken  
64 from the database included within the software. Periodic boundary conditions were used for the  
65 triangular lattice pattern under auto-optimised mesh size (Fig. 2(a,b)).

66 Cross sections of absorption  $\sigma_{abs}$ , scattering  $\sigma_{sc}$  and extinction (i.e., the total losses  $\sigma_{ext} = \sigma_{abs} + \sigma_{sc}$ )  
67 were calculated using total-field scattered-field light source (Fig. 2(c)). Nanoprisms with side length of  
68  $L = 180$  nm made on SiO<sub>2</sub> or SiO<sub>2</sub>-on-Si showed strong scattering around 800 nm wavelength which  
69 was used in this study for SHG from such metasurfaces. At this nanoprism size, the scattering is  
70 stronger than absorbance which is also important for efficient SHG. Only a SiO<sub>2</sub> spacer thickness of  
71  $w = 180$  nm is shown in Fig. 2(c) to illustrate the effect of markedly increased scattering. Nanoprisms  
72 on Si had red-shifted resonance and is outside the scope of this study. It is noteworthy, that light E-field  
73 enhancement is even stronger at the Au-Si interface as compared with Au-SiO<sub>2</sub> and can be useful  
74 for sensor applications in the IR spectral range. These numerical estimates of light absorption and  
75 scattering by single nanoprisms was encouragement to embark on fabrication of arrays with different  
76 sized nanoprisms on reflective Si substrates with different SiO<sub>2</sub> spacer thicknesses.

### 77 3. Results and Discussion

78 The second-order NLO responses of the metal nanoparticles are expressed by the surface integral  
79 of the local non-linear polarisations created on the metal surfaces [15]. The second-order NLO  
80 susceptibilities  $\chi^{(2)}$  of the metal surfaces are predominantly determined by the surface effects [16–18].  
81 The electric-dipole type selection rule is applied for expressing the non-linear wave conversions on  
82 the metal nanoparticles [19]. The geometries of the triangular nanoprisms are classified into  $D3h$   
83 point group with three non-zero non-linear tensor components  $\chi_{yxx}^{(2)}$ ,  $\chi_{yyx}^{(2)}$ , and  $\chi_{xxy}^{(2)}$  [20], where the



**Figure 3.** (a) Scattering spectrum of Au nanoprisms on glass for two polarisations in back-scattering geometry. The sizes of the nanoprism were:  $L = 150$  nm base of the equilateral triangle, 30 nm thickness, corner-to-corner separation was 250 nm. The prisms arranged two-dimensionally in a trigonal lattice (see SEM image in inset). (b) Polarisation-resolved SHG ( $2\omega$ ) at 800 nm ( $\omega$ ) excitation for different linear and the circular (left- and right-hand) polarisations of excitation in back-scattering/reflection geometry. SHG was y-polarised for different angles of orientation of the incident linearly polarised light ( $\omega$ ). SHG was linearly polarised at  $\pm 45^\circ$  from y-axis for the LHC and RHC excitation ( $\omega$ ).

84 x and y-directions are defined as the base and height directions of the triangular nanoprisms. The  
 85 field distributions calculated by FDTD distributions were symmetric in the y-axis for both of the  
 86 pump polarisation geometries and asymmetric in the x-axis. Thus, the SHG emissions along the  
 87 y-axis was related to breaking symmetry in the x-directions of the electric field, hence, the non-linear  
 88 tensor components  $\chi_{yx}^{(2)}$  and  $\chi_{yy}^{(2)}$  were responsible for the second-order non-linearities. Next, we  
 89 tested experimentally the angular dependence of scattering at different excitation wavelengths and  
 90 polarisation dependence at the maximum of the SHG at 800 nm for nanoprisms on glass samples.

### 91 3.1. Au triangular nanoprisms on glass

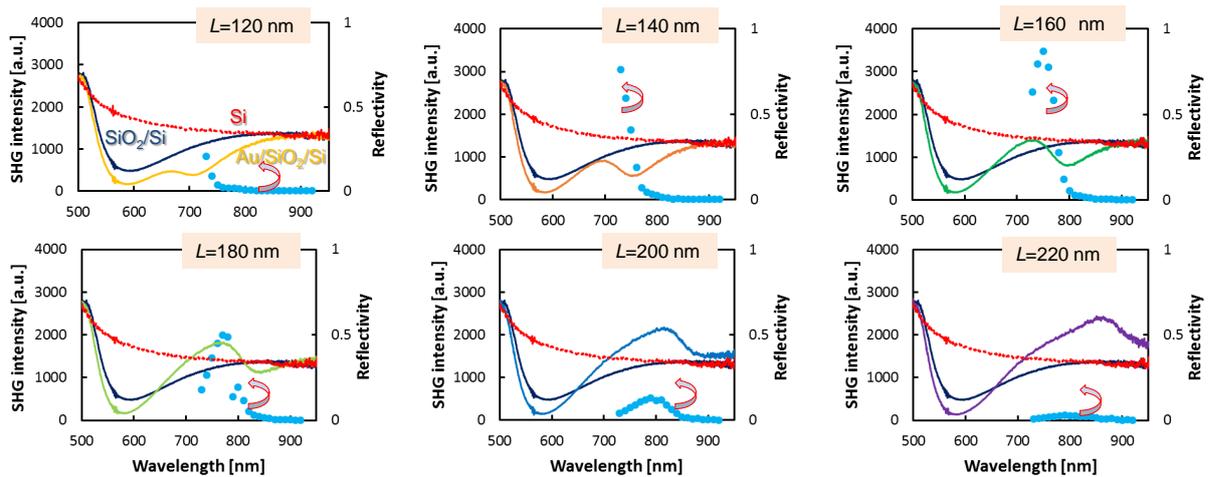
92 Figure 3 shows the scattering spectrum from the Au nanoprisms. The scattering spectra were  
 93 probed by light with polarisations either parallel or perpendicular to the baselines of nanoprisms  
 94 (x- and y-pol. respectively). The spectral shape of the scattering signal was independent on the  
 95 polarisation direction of the probe light and peaked at 800 nm. The linear optical properties of the  
 96 nanoprisms were isotropic. Independent of the polarisation of the excitation, the Au nanorods emitted  
 97 the SHG at polarisation perpendicular to the baseline of the triangular nanoprism (Fig. 3(b)). The SHG  
 98 spectroscopy was performed for the nanoprisms with right- and left-handed circular (RHC, LHC)  
 99 polarised excitation.

100 The SHG intensities transmitted continuously through the  $\lambda/4$ -plate and the polariser was the  
 101 highest at  $+45^\circ$  for the LHC excitation and  $-45^\circ$  for the RHC (Fig. 3(b)). The form of the nonlinear  
 102 susceptibility tensor for the  $D3h$  symmetry demands that the circularly-polarised fundamental light  
 103 waves are converted into the circularly-polarised SHG waves. The rotation direction of the SHG waves  
 104 had to be opposite to that of the fundamental. The polarisation state observed by  $\lambda/4$ -plate and the  
 105 Glan-Taylor prism is consistent with the expectation imposed by the tensor form for the structures  
 106 with the  $D3h$  symmetry [14].

107 Next, we investigate how SHG can be controlled by increasing light field enhancement at the excitation  
 108 wavelength.

### 109 3.2. Au triangular nanoprisms on Si with $\text{SiO}_2$ spacer

110 Triangular nanoprisms with different side length from  $L = 120$  to 140 nm were fabricated on a  
 111 strongly reflective Si substrate with two different  $\text{SiO}_2$  spacer thicknesses of  $w = 200$  nm and 300 nm  
 112 (Fig. 1).

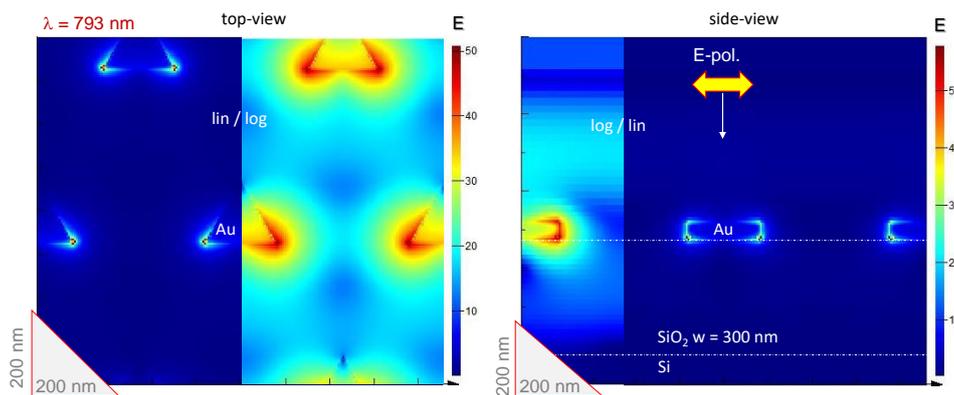


**Figure 4.** Plots showing experimentally measured SHG excitation spectra from metasurfaces (cyan dots, left-axis) of Au triangular nanoparticles on a SiO<sub>2</sub>/Si substrate with triangle side-lengths,  $L = 120$  nm to 220 nm. Reflectivity spectra  $R(\lambda)$  (right-axis) are shown for bare Si, Si with SiO<sub>2</sub>, and the metasurface for each plot. The SiO<sub>2</sub> spacer width was the same  $w = 300$  nm (see Fig. A1 for  $w = 200$  nm). Polarisation of the incident field was horizontal  $E_x$ .

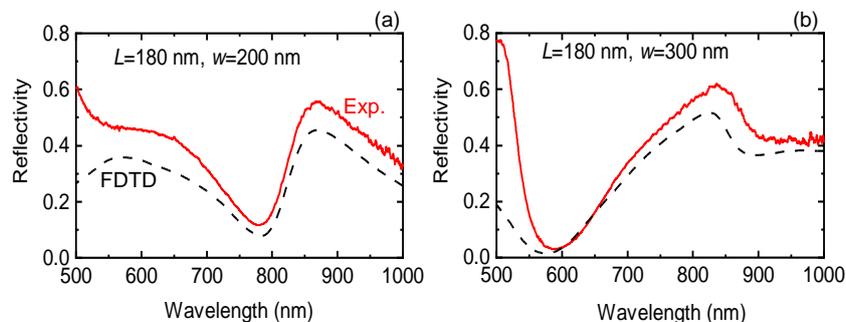
113 Figures 4 (also, see Fig. A1) summarise reflectivity and SHG results from metasurfaces with  
 114 different side length  $L$  of nanoprisms. The largest spectral sensitivity of SHG vs size of nanoprism  
 115  $L$  was observed for the thicker  $w = 300$  nm spacer (Fig. 4). For thinner  $w = 200$  nm, the SHG from  
 116  $L = 120$  and 140 nm metasurfaces was measurable but at the level of tens-of-counts (Fig. A1) and the  
 117 strongest SHG was observed for  $L = 220$  nm. It is instructive to compare spectral SHG response with  
 118 reflectivity spectrum. An increase of SHG was observed when the SiO<sub>2</sub> spacer conferred anti-reflective  
 119 properties to the surface ( $R$  smaller as compared with bare Si). The reflectivity of a metasurface with  
 120 Au nanoprisms is defined by the geometry: period and size of nanoparticles. At peak reflectivity of  
 121 the fundamental wavelength, the strongest SHG was observed. FDTD simulations confirmed this  
 122 observation (Fig. 2(b) shows the maximum SHG at  $\lambda = 825$  nm). For  $w = 200$  nm, SHG was enhanced  
 123 for larger nanoprisms  $L \geq 180$  nm (Fig. A1). Larger triangles formed a larger unit cell of the triangular  
 124 lattice, hence, the increase of SHG is affected as the ratio of metal area per unit cell, i.e.,  $S_{Au}/S_{cell} \equiv \frac{L^2}{2\Lambda^2}$ ,  
 125 where  $\Lambda = L + 300$  nm for the data shown in Figs. 4, A1.

126 On the resonance at maximum reflectivity, SHG was enhanced more than  $3 \times 10^3$  times as compared  
 127 with the non-resonant case (Fig. 4). Also, the maximum of SHG was observed at shorter wavelengths.  
 128 Obviously the effect of the spacer as a phase retarder for the light reflected from Si on a path to  
 129 the nanoprism and positively interfering with incident and reflected light from the top of the SiO<sub>2</sub>  
 130 layer is an important factor. Although the Au nanoprisms were made on Si substrates without SiO<sub>2</sub>  
 131 spacer, the plasmonic responses were not observed in the present spectral window due to a high  $\sim 3.7$   
 132 refractive index of Si causing the localized surface plasmon resonance condition satisfied at much  
 133 longer wavelengths.

134 The maximum of SHG had well defined optimal conditions which corresponded to  $L = 160$  nm  
 135 and  $w = 300$  nm. FDTD calculations confirmed the strongest light enhancement occurring at the  
 136 tips of nanoprisms observed at the experimentally determined maximum of SHG enhancement.  
 137 Figure 5 shows the light field enhancement close to the peak wavelength of SHG for  $L = 180$  nm.  
 138 The enhancement of the E-field more than 50 times was observed and was located at the silica-Au  
 139 interface. It is noteworthy that the absolute values of enhancement obtained by FDTD should not  
 140 be considered due to ideal geometrical structures and interfaces being different due to fabrication  
 141 tolerances [21,22]. The side-view FDTD cross section (Fig. 5) reveals that some of incident light is  
 142 scattered at larger angles from the direction of propagation at the edges/corners of the nanoprisms.  
 143 This facilitates light trapping in silica (between air and Si) which contributes to light enhancement at



**Figure 5.** FDTD at the maximum E-field enhancement for  $L = 180$  nm and  $w = 300$  nm (see Fig. 4). The top-view monitor is at the air-silica interface and the side-view monitor crosses the side of triangle and vertices with the highest field enhancement. The E-field scale bars are linear; polarisation of incident field was horizontal  $E_x$ .



**Figure 6.** Experimental (Exp; red) and calculated (FDTD; dashed) reflectivity spectra of Au nanoprisms with  $L = 180$  nm side length. The thicknesses of the  $\text{SiO}_2$  spacer were (a)  $w = 200$  nm and (b)  $300$  nm.

144 neighbouring nanoprisms.

145 The maximum of SHG is red-shifted for larger nano-triangles. This tendency was confirmed by FDTD  
 146 simulations (Fig. A2). The maximum of E-field enhancement was observed at 924 nm wavelength  
 147 ( $L = 220$  nm) as compared with 825 nm for the  $L = 180$  nm. The pattern of E-field enhancement  
 148 was qualitative same, the vertexes of equal-side triangles which are aligned to the polarisation of  
 149 incident plane wave are enhanced. The peak enhancement up to  $E = 30$  times was observed at the  
 150 maximum (incident field  $E = 1$ ). Side-view of E-field distribution shows even stronger localization  
 151 at the  $\text{SiO}_2$ -air-Au point (note, the lateral cross sections are shown at 15 nm above the interface at the  
 152 middle thickness of Au nanoparticle). These locations of largest E-field localization at the interface are  
 153 locations for SHG. From the side-view image it is also clear that some light was deposited into the  
 154  $\text{SiO}_2$  spacer which also facilitates field enhancement at the neighbouring nanoparticles.

155 Figure 6 shows direct comparison between experimentally measured reflectivity  $R$  together with  
 156 FDTD numerical results for the two tested spacer thicknesses. Maximum of  $R$  was a good predictor  
 157 for the most efficient SHG and a good match between theoretical estimates and experimentally  
 158 measured  $R$  values was observed at the peak of SHG. It could be envisaged that by using different  
 159 2D and 3D nanofabrication techniques including direct laser writing [23–26] it should be possible  
 160 to inscribe non-centrosymmetric patterns into the interface or fill by NLO polymers rendering  
 161 such meta-surfaces/materials as efficient SHG materials [27]. The use of reflective plasmonic  
 162 non-centrosymmetric patterns are very promising for nanoscale engineering of SHG [28,29]. The  
 163 presented triangular symmetric  $D3h$  pattern of nanoprisms can be used to enhance SHG from 2D  
 164 materials of the same symmetry, e.g.,  $\text{WSe}_2$ , which showed SHG from monolayer flakes [30]. Also,

165 photo and thermally induced material re-organisation can be used for breaking usually random  
 166 orientation and symmetry of polymers to make them active for SHG [31]. Use of anisotropic  
 167 bio-polymers such as silk [32] and nanocellulose [33] and their polymer composites is another way to  
 168 make host materials for the anisotropic light-matter interaction required for SGH.

#### 169 4. Conclusions and Outlook

170 It is demonstrated that SHG from non-centro-symmetric triangular nanoprisms can be enhanced  
 171 using a SiO<sub>2</sub> spacer between the nanoprisms and Si substrate. Experimental results proved that  
 172 the Au nanoprisms are well suited for harnessing second-order non-linearities at normal incidence  
 173 conditions at the nanoscale. The polarisation dependence of SHG showed that at the linearly polarised  
 174 fundamental wave the SHG was always y-polarised, independent of the polarisation of the excitation  
 175 light. For the circularly polarised excitation, the SHG was also circularly polarised with the handedness  
 176 opposite to the excitation light as expected from the *D3h* symmetry.

177 By optimising the thickness of the SiO<sub>2</sub> spacer it is possible to maximise SHG generation by  
 178 several orders of magnitude. It is expected that this method will allow achievement of high yield SHG  
 179 from films of non-linear optical (NLO) materials placed on metasurfaces:  $I(2\omega) \propto |\chi_{meta}^{(2)} + \chi_{NLO}^{(2)} \times$   
 180  $d_{NLO}|^2 I^2(\omega)$ , where  $I(\omega)$  is light intensity at the fundamental wavelength ( $\lambda = 2\pi c/\omega$ ) which is  
 181 locally enhanced at the nanoscale on the nanoprisms,  $d_{NLO}$  is the thickness of the non-linear optical  
 182 material which is expected to be thin for best harvesting of the local field enhancement. Metasurfaces  
 183 of nanoparticles are expected to be able to withstand higher light intensities without degradation  
 184 and has to be investigated next. As polymers enters the second century of their development [34], a  
 185 combination of new polymers with augmented functionalities and metasurfaces will bring new science  
 186 and applications.

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 188 investigation (experimental), K.M., M.S., H.Y.; investigation (numerical) M.S., S. L., J.H. S.H.N.; resources, A.S.;  
 189 data curation, A.S., S.H.N., Y.N.; writing—original draft preparation, A.S., S.J.; writing—review and editing, all  
 190 the authors; visualisation, K.M., H.Y.; supervision, A.S.; project administration, A.S.; funding acquisition, A.S.

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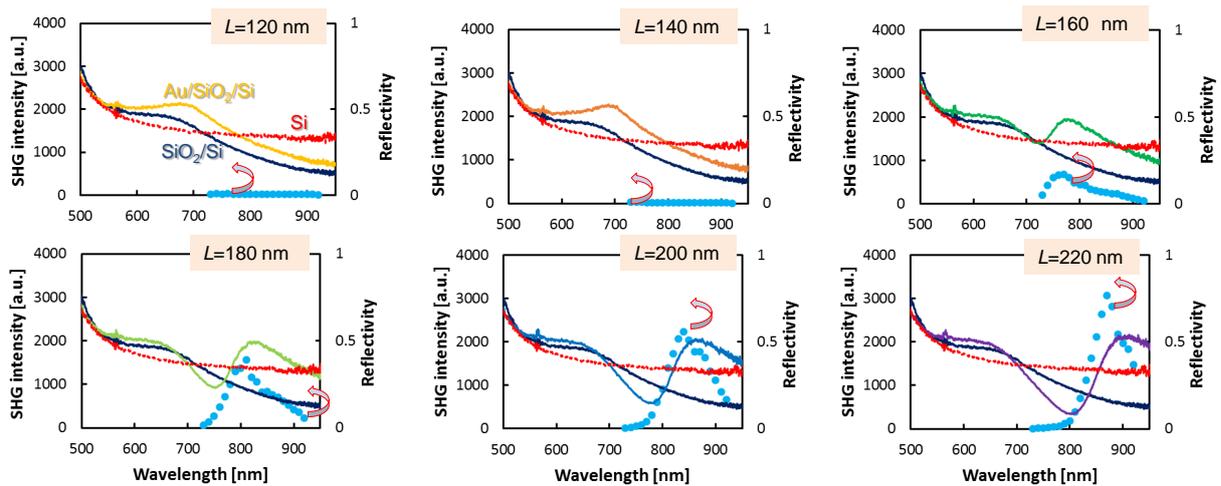
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198 **Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

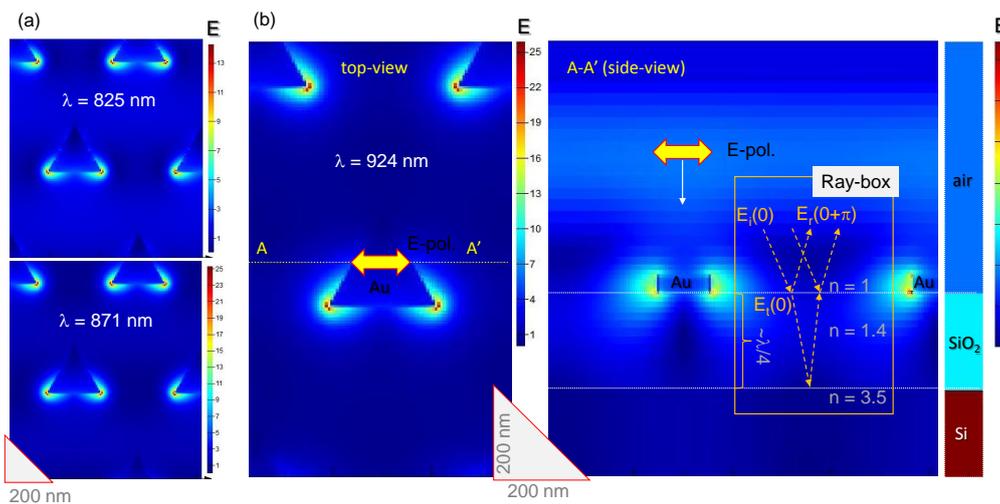
#### 199 Appendix A Reflection and SHG spectra for $w = 200$ nm SiO<sub>2</sub> on Si

200 Experimental spectra of reflectivity and SHG are overlaid for the metasurfaces with the side  
 201 length of the nanoprism ranging from  $L = 120$  nm to 220 nm for the SiO<sub>2</sub> spaced  $w = 200$  nm in  
 202 Fig. A1 (see main text for  $w = 300$  nm in Fig. 4).

203 Figure A2 presents summary a of FDTD modeling of the light field enhancement for the  $w =$   
 204 200 nm SiO<sub>2</sub> spacer at several wavelengths. The inset “ray-box” shows schematics of interference  
 205 taking place on the front surface as addition of the SiO<sub>2</sub>-reflected and Si-reflected rays. Each of them  
 206 experience  $\pi$  phase shift due to reflectance from the medium with a higher refractive index. The  
 207 Si-reflected ray has additional propagation phase traversing the SiO<sub>2</sub> spacer twice. When the spacer is  
 208 close to the  $\lambda/4$  condition, a constructive E-field addition takes place on the air-SiO<sub>2</sub> surface (where  
 209 Au nanoprisms are positioned). The actual field values depend on the Fresnel coefficients, which  
 210 are, in turn, incidence angle dependent. This interference and phase matching is the physical reason  
 211 for the increased SHG efficiency with the optimised thickness of SiO<sub>2</sub> spacer around  $w = 300$  m [10].  
 212 Such description is strictly valid for the optical far-field representation of reflection and the actual  
 213 near-field conditions where diffraction from the Au nanoprisms is taking place is accounted for in the



**Figure A1.** Plots showing experimentally measured SHG excitation spectra from metasurfaces (cyan dots, left-axis) of Au triangular nanoparticles on a SiO<sub>2</sub>/Si substrate with triangle side-lengths,  $L = 120$  nm to 220 nm. Reflectivity spectra  $R(\lambda)$  (right-axis) are shown for bare Si, Si with SiO<sub>2</sub>, and the metasurface for each plot. The SiO<sub>2</sub> spacer width was the same  $w = 200$  nm. Polarisation of the incident field was horizontal  $E_x$ .



**Figure A2.** FDTD simulations for the  $L = 220$  nm  $w = 200$  nm case. (a) E-field enhancement at  $\lambda = 825$  nm (see Fig. 2(b) for comparison) and 871 nm which are close-to-maximum. (b) Top- and side views of E-field enhancement for a linearly polarised plane wave. Refractive index cross-section is shown on right-side to distinguish the lateral cross-sections. Note, the cross-section  $A-A'$  is made through the center of triangle and not at the largest intensity vertexes. Incident light has  $E_x$  polarisation. Inset “ray-box” shows schematically the phase change upon reflection from interfaces for the incident, transmitted and reflected E-fields  $E_{i,t,r}$  in ray optics presentation [10]. In addition to the Fresnel coefficient defined phase changes, a propagation phase is adding up and amounts to  $\pi$  for traversing a  $\lambda/4$  thickness twice upon back-reflection from Si.

214 FDTD simulations. More systematic studies are required for the dependence of SHG from the spacer  
 215 thickness  $w$ . Here, only two thicknesses  $w = 200$  nm and 300 nm were tested.

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