

Commentary – March 2023

Global equities put in a strong finish to the first quarter of 2023, rising by 5.5% in Sterling terms, with the Vermeer Global Fund finishing the quarter 7.2% higher. In March the Vermeer Global Fund returned 1.6%, above the 1.2% return from the global equity market.

Over March the top five contributors to return were Microsoft, Novo Nordisk, Apple, Keyence and Nvidia. The top five detractors to return were BP, Befesa, Cameco, Jack Henry and Caterpillar.

March was another very volatile month for equity markets and the Fund did not make any changes to the portfolio during the period. This market volatility was created by a major crisis in the global banking industry as Credit Suisse had to be rescued by UBS following a loss of confidence in its franchise that was triggered by the collapse of two US regional banks, Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank.

Our portfolio remains very underweight banks, with just two positions both based in Asia. We are monitoring our positioning in the sector very carefully as an opportunity to invest in the space may present itself. However, we are concerned that there will be even greater regulatory oversight for the banking industry and that banks may be required to hold more capital, restricting their ability to grow dividends and to buy back shares.

Despite the initial fears of a financial crisis that the problems at Credit Suisse and the US regional banks triggered in markets, stocks have subsequently been able to rally. This has been helped by a substantial fall in bond yields that has particularly aided the performance of growth stocks, especially the eight mega-cap US companies that make up a very large percentage of the benchmark index. These eight stocks, which include Amazon, Apple, Microsoft and Nvidia, have all enjoyed a very positive start to the year.

Out of these eight companies, the Fund owns five names which make up around 12% of the portfolio. AI champion Nvidia has more than doubled off its October lows after enduring a horror 2022 and we plan to hold this investment for the long term despite its very volatile performance. These stocks have totally dominated performance of the global benchmark in the first quarter and are largely responsible for the positive performance from US equities so far this year.

Our current cash position is around 9% and we continue to look for selective opportunities to invest in quality companies at attractive valuations whilst remaining cautious that progress by the overall market may be limited at current levels.

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