Ariel investments

Quarterly Commentary

Ariel Global (USD)

Quarter Ended December 31, 2023

Markets worldwide defied expectations in 2023 led by the dominating performance of mega-cap technology stocks known as the "magnificent seven.[1]" Even though gains have been concentrated, improving inflation data and growing excitement central banks will cut interest rates sooner than expected drove a fourth quarter rally and strong finish to the year. Investor sentiment has shifted from fears of a recession towards optimism for a soft landing. Such turns in market psychology and economic forecasts continue to highlight the challenges of market timing and the importance of taking a long-term view. Although uncertainty and volatility are likely to remain elevated, the patient investor knows "stock prices trade on fundamentals. And when those solid fundamentals shine through, share prices rise.[2]" Meanwhile, we remain laser focused on improving upside capture across our international and global portfolios while preserving downside protection. Against this backdrop, the Ariel Global Composite increased +8.40% gross of fees (+8.18% net of fees) in the quarter, trailing both the MSCI ACWI Index and the MSCI ACWI Value Index which posted gains of +11.03% and +9.17%, respectively. Over the trailing one-year period, the Ariel Global Composite advanced +13.96% gross of fees (+13.06% net of fees), underperforming the MSCI ACWI Index's +22.20% gain, but ahead of the +11.81% return of the MSCI ACWI Value Index.

Ariel's non-consensus approach seeks to identify undervalued, out-of-favor, franchises that are misunderstood and therefore mispriced. The Ariel Global strategy continues to be overweight defensive sectors such as Health Care, Communication Services and Utilities, significantly underweight Industrials and lacks exposure to Energy and Materials. At the sector level, our avoidance of Energy was the greatest contributor, while our Health Care and Utilities holdings were the largest performance detractors.

New holding, **Intel Corporation**, one of the world's largest semiconductor chip manufacturers by revenue, outperformed in the quarter. Intel is benefitting from the near-term rebound in semiconductor demand driven by the cyclical recovery of personal computers (PCs) and central processing units (CPUs). Shares also traded higher following the company's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Everywhere launch event. Intel introduced its capabilities across cloud, edge and client hardware and showcased it can benefit from an enterprise upgrade cycle as both cloud-based and traditional enterprises look to incorporate AI features into core technology platforms. In our view, the market is also overlooking the progress Intel has made towards regaining its manufacturing technology advantage and believe the foundry business will continue to experience strong momentum as it grows its customer base and revenue.

Global communications and technology leader, **Verizon Communications Inc.** also traded higher in the period following solid earnings results, highlighted by postpaid consumer net additions and an upward revision to free cash flow guidance. From a competitive and financial standpoint, we view Verizon to be among one of the best positioned telecoms in the world. The company's solid long-term fundamentals are underscored by its predictable, recurring revenue streams and ~7% dividend yield. At current levels, Verizon is trading near an all-time low valuation presenting a compelling total return story for patient investors.

Additionally, German mobile telecommunications company, **Telefónica Deutschland Holdings AG** outperformed in the period following Telefónica SA's public tender offer to purchase the remaining 28% it did not own in the German company. We exited the position shortly after the announcement on valuation.

By comparison, China's internet search and online community leader, **Baidu, Inc.** traded lower alongside Chinese equities as intensifying problems in China weighed on investor sentiment during the period. The company continues to invest heavily in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and recently launched its generative AI, Ernie Bot, aimed at rivaling Open AI's

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[1] The "Magnificent Seven" are the largest stocks in the S&P 500 Index driving market performance: Apple Inc. (AAPL), Amazon.com, Inc. (AMZN), Alphabet Inc. (GOOGL), Meta Platforms Inc. (META), Microsoft Corp. (MSFT), NVIDIA Corp. (NVDA) and Tesla, Inc. (TSLA).

[2] Hobson, Mellody and John W. Rogers Jr. "What the Stock market Taught Us This Year: Don't Fall for These Investing Traps." Wall Street Journal, 5 December 2023. https://www.wsj.com/finance/investing/stock-market-2023-lessons-investing-2cedd44f

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ChatGPT. While monetization of the new technology is largely dependent on regulatory review, we think Baidu should continue to experience margin improvement with the ongoing implementation of efficiency and profitability initiatives. While some investors remain on the sidelines due to uncertainty surrounding China's economic growth, government regulations, and the political rhetoric towards Taiwan, we remain enthusiastic about Baidu's longer-term opportunity for revenue growth and margin expansion across internet search, cloud, autonomous driving, artificial intelligence and online video.

Biopharmaceutical company, **Bristol-Myers Squibb Company (BMY)**, also underperformed in the quarter on mixed earnings results and a reduction in guidance due to a delay across several new product launches. Although the company's mid- to long-term targets remain intact, management expects a transition period before the company returns to top-tier growth. In our view, many of the new drugs represent either the first-in-class (the first molecule approved by the FDA) or best efficacy opportunities and believe the new product portfolio should outperform expectations over time. Meanwhile, management remains bullish on its maturing pipeline and reaffirmed it will continue to seek business development through bolt-on acquisitions and licensing deals.

Finally, Japanese auto manufacturer, **Subaru Corporation**, weighed on results in the period. We believe this recent price action to be primarily driven by appreciation in the Japanese yen and think the weakness in shares runs counter to the company's strong business model. Subaru recently reported healthy earning results driven by robust demand in North America and lower raw materials prices. We remain focused on Subaru's solid business fundamentals and view its EV roadmap as a long-term opportunity to increase market share.

We initiated twelve new positions in the quarter.

We found an attractive entry point for London based, agriculture machinery manufacturer, **CNH Industrial NV (CNHI)**, as shares are currently pricing in multi-year declines similar to the slope of the last agricultural downcycle (2014-2016). Although farm incomes have begun to moderate and will likely translate to lower machinery purchasing in 2024, our analysis of U.S. farm fundamentals suggests the severity and longevity of the next downcycle will likely be shallower and shorter in duration. Additionally, CNHI remains on track to deliver on previously articulated operational efficiency and cost savings targets, which should drive margin improvement and profitability growth over the near to medium term. Looking ahead, we believe the industry will benefit from precision agriculture.

We purchased Danish multinational banking and financial services company, **Danske Bank A/S** in the period. Following several years of litigation concerning money-laundering violations, the company recently finalized a settlement, removing the overhang on shares. Meanwhile, the business is demonstrating solid operating momentum, highlighted by the strong credit quality of its customer base as well as improving net interest margin and strong balance sheet. We believe Danske Bank will begin returning capital to shareholders through dividends or buybacks in 2024.

We added positions in, leading providers of dialysis services, **DaVita, Inc.** and **Fresenius Medical Care AG & Co.** Fresenius Medical Care AG & Co. is the worldwide leader in the treatment of renal disease, while Davita, Inc. administers its services to over 2,700 outpatient dialysis centers across 45+ states and operates over 350 outpatient dialysis centers in 12 total countries. The shares of each company came under pressure following the release of clinical data on the efficacy of glucagon-like-peptide-1 (GLP-1) weight-loss drugs and their potential to negatively impact the demand for dialysis, providing us with attractive entry points in both names. Even assuming high rates of both uptake and effectiveness, we believe the overall impact on dialysis volumes will be small in the near-to-medium term. We also think the cardio protective effects of the GLP-1 class may enable patients to live longer, thereby increasing the overall size of the end-stage renal disease incidence pool. We believed the market misunderstood the actual long-term clinical impact on dialysis and were able to purchase at attractive valuation levels.

We initiated a position in one of the largest banks in Mexico, **Grupo Financiero Banorte S.A.B. de C.V.**, which is currently experiencing above average growth driven by positive nearshoring effects. The bank continues to see improvements in the quality of its low-cost deposit base and growing consumer loan book. In our view, these factors will allow Banorte to sustain solid net interest margins. We find the company's strong credit quality and attractive return-on-equity to be appealing long-term.

We purchased **Intel Corporation**, one of the world's largest semiconductor chip manufacturers by revenue. We believe Intel is well-positioned to benefit from the near-term rebound in semiconductor demand driven by the cyclical recovery of personal computers (PCs) and central processing units (CPUs). In our view, the market is also overlooking the progress Intel has made towards regaining its manufacturing technology advantage and believe the foundry business will continue to experience strong momentum as it grows its customer base and revenue.

We added Korea's largest financial company in terms of assets and customer base, **KB Financial Group**. We believe the company's strong and stable diversified profit structure and industry leading shareholder returns are well supported by its various business lines and subsidiaries. At current levels, KB Financial is trading at a significant discount to our estimate of private market value.

We also initiated a position in Korean-based leading manufacturer of mobile phones and smartphones, **Samsung Electronic Company, Ltd.** We see signs of the memory market bottoming driven by supply cuts during a time when demand is near trough levels. Heading into 2024, we expect the company will benefit from a cyclical recovery in memory as well as rising prices as supply/demand stabilizes. We also think replacement demand for smartphones will improve. Longer term, we believe there is upside optionality in Samsung's foundry and display businesses from a fundamental perspective that better transparency and more detailed financial segment reporting would unlock.

We purchased manufacturer and marketer of integrated circuits, **Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, Ltd.** TSMC has a dominant share of the global foundry market and is an industry leader in terms of scale, technology, customer service and execution. Although demand for smartphones and PCs is stabilizing, we expect the company to benefit from the secular growth trends of Artificial Intelligence (AI) longer-term. A downturn in the foundry industry this year presented us with an attractive entry point, as we think the current forward price-to-earnings ratio does not fully reflect the high-quality nature of the business model.

We initiated a position in financial services company, **Truist Financial Corporation**. After the merger of BB&T and SunTrust formed Truist in 2019, management has prioritized simplifying the organization and reducing expenses to optimize profitability. After successfully selling a portion of the insurance business, TFC is now considering selling the remaining stake. While we take no definitive view on the likelihood of a sale, we believe this would be a positive catalyst for the company. TFC could leverage the deal to strengthen its adjusted capital profile, improve margins as well as accelerate its investment in technology. Meanwhile, the company is trading at a significant discount relative to our estimate of its intrinsic value.

We bought **Vanguard Total World Stock ETF** as a cash alternative during the month.

And finally, we added Hungarian, ultra-low cost airline provider, **Wizz Air Holdings plc.** An investigation into the Pratt & Whitney (P&W) Geared Turbofan (GTF) engine, which powers the airlines A320 NEO family aircrafts, has grounded 22% of the fleet for 18 months presenting us with an attractive entry point. Although this issue will reduce flight capacity over the near to medium-term, WIZZ has agreed to a cash compensation package with P&W. We anticipate the overall impact on earnings will be further mitigated by the delivery of new planes, lease extensions and more optimal fly routes and schedules. At current levels, WIZZ is trading at a significant discount to our estimate of its intrinsic value and expansion prospects across Western Europe and the Middle East.

By comparison, we exited twelve positions in the quarter.

We sold leading domestic producer of infant milk formula in China, **China Feihe, Ltd.**, Brazilian financial services company, **Itau Unibanco Holding SA**, leading pharmaceutical, consumer health and medical device company, **Johnson & Johnson**, and German mobile telecommunications company, **Telefónica Deutschland Holdings AG** on valuation.

To pursue higher conviction opportunities and pare back holdings representing less than 1% of the portfolio so each of our resulting holdings may have more impact, we sold our stakes in the following names: Chilean Bank, **Banco Santander Chile**, luxury accessory and lifestyle brand, **Tapestry, Inc.**, Brazil-based brewing company, **Ambev SA**, leading derivatives exchange, **CME Group, Inc.**, Mexico's leading stock exchange, **Bolsa Mexicana de Valores S.A.B. de C.V.**, Luxembourg based media company, **RTL Group**, leading long form online video entertainment service in China, **iQIYI Inc.** and multinational pharmaceuticals company, **Novartis AG**.

Despite the recent market rally and consensus for a soft landing in 2024, our outlook is more cautious as geopolitical tensions are high, global growth is slowing and monetary policy remains unpredictable. We expect these uncertainties will likely result in a period of heightened volatility and widening dispersion of returns, creating opportunities for active managers with focused expertise to shine. While market concentrations have their own peaks and troughs, the mega-cap technology names appear vulnerable to a correction. In our view, higher quality companies with robust balance sheets will be the drivers of future outperformance. Accordingly, we are finding many mispriced stocks where valuation is attractive, profitability less vulnerable and balance sheets remain strong.

Investments in non-U.S. securities may underperform and may be more volatile than comparable U.S. stocks because of the risks involving non-U.S. economies, markets, political systems, regulatory standards, currencies and taxes. The use of currency derivatives and ETFs may increase investment losses and expenses and create more volatility. Investments in emerging markets present additional risks, such as difficulties in selling on a timely basis and at an acceptable price. The intrinsic value of the stocks within the strategy may never be recognized by the broader market. The strategy is often concentrated in fewer sectors than its benchmarks, and its performance may suffer if these sectors underperform the overall stock market.

Past performance does not guarantee future results. Performance results are shown net of the highest management fee charged to any client in the Composite during the performance period. Net returns reflect performance returns after the deduction of advisory fees and transaction costs and assume the reinvestment of dividends and other earnings. For the period ended 12/31/2023, the performance (net of fees) of the Ariel Global Composite for the 1, 5, and 10-year periods were +13.06%, +8.72%, and +6.55%, respectively. For the period ended 12/31/2023, the performance for the MSCI ACWI Index and the MSCI ACWI Value Index for the 1, 5, and 10-year periods were +22.20%, +11.72%, and +7.93% and +11.81%, +8.25%, and +5.46%, respectively. Actual fees may vary depending on, among other things, the applicable fee schedule and portfolio size. A complete fee schedule is available upon request and may also be found in Ariel Investments LLC's Form ADV, Part 2. Returns are expressed in U.S. dollars. Current performance may be lower or higher than the performance data quoted. The Ariel Global Composite differs from its benchmark, the MSCI ACWI (All Country World Index), because the Composite has fewer holdings than the benchmark.

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As of 12/31/2023, Intel Corporation constituted 3.6% of the Ariel Global Composite (representative portfolio); Verizon Communications Inc. 3.9%; Telefónica Deutschland Holding AG 0.0%; Baidu, Inc. 4.5%; Bristol-Myers Squibb Company 2.5%; Subaru Corporation 2.7%; CNH Industrial NV 1.0%; DaVita Inc. 3.4%; Danske Bank A/S 1.0%; Fresenius Medical Care AG 1.5%; Grupo Financiero Banorte S.A.B. de C.V. 1.3%; KB Financial Group 1.7%; Samsung Electronic Company 2.3%; Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company 1.9%; Truist Financial Corporation 2.2%; Vanguard Total World Stock ETF 0.6%; Wizz Air Holdings Plc 0.4%; Ambev SA 0.0%; Banco Santander Chile 0.0%; Bolsa Mexicana de Valores S.A.B. de C.V. 0.0%; CME Group, Inc. 0.0%; China Feihe, Ltd. 0.0%; Itau Unibanco Holding SA 0.0%; Johnson & Johnson 0.0%; Novartis AG 0.0%; RTL Group 0.0%; Tapestry, Inc. 0.0%; and iQIYI Inc. 0.0%. Portfolio holdings are subject to change. The performance of any single portfolio holding is no indication of the performance of other portfolio holdings of the Ariel Global Composite.

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A glossary of financial terms provided herein may be found on our website at www.arielinvestments.com.

Indexes are unmanaged. An investor cannot invest directly in an index. The MSCI ACWI (All Country World Index) Index is an equity index of large and mid-cap representation across 23 Developed Markets (DM) and 24 Emerging Markets (EM) countries. Its inception date is January 1, 2001.The MSCI ACWI Value Index captures large and mid-cap securities exhibiting overall value style characteristics across 23 Developed Markets countries and 24 Emerging Markets (EM) countries. Its inception date is December 8, 1997. All MSCI Index net returns reflect the reinvestment of income and other earnings, including the dividends net of the maximum withholding tax applicable to non-resident institutional investors that do not benefit from double taxation treaties. MSCI uses the maximum tax rate applicable to institutional investors, as determined by the company’s country of incorporation. MSCI makes no express or implied warranties

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