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MARKET REVIEW

Global equities rose in September. Stocks fell sharply at the beginning of the month after declines in some mega-cap technology stocks and signs of a cooling US economy rippled across the globe and stoked concerns about the state of the global economy. However, stocks rebounded following a sizable 50 basis points interest-rate cut by the US Federal Reserve and a more forceful Chinese stimulus that bolstered market sentiment. Lower energy prices helped to ease inflationary pressures, and resilient labor markets in the US, Europe, and Japan reinforced the view that the global economy could achieve a soft landing. However, some key economic indicators were mixed across many developed nations, with services PMIs remaining in expansionary territory, while manufacturing PMIs continued to show sustained weakness. In China, markets were encouraged by more substantial policy support from the People's Bank of China, which aimed to revitalize the country's economic recovery. Politics garnered greater attention amid a close US presidential race and leadership changes in other countries; Shigeru Ishiba was elected as Japan's prime minister, Michael Barnier became France's prime minister, and Claudia Sheinbaum was sworn in as Mexico's first female president. Geopolitical risks intensified, with escalating conflict in the Middle East threatening to ignite a broader regional war after Israeli forces killed Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah in Beirut.

FUND PERFORMANCE AND ATTRIBUTION

- The fund delivered positive returns over the period.
- Information technology and industrials were the top contributing sectors, while consumer discretionary was the bottom contributing sector.
- At the issuer level, our top two absolute contributors were Guidewire Software and WEX, while our top two absolute detractors were Trupanion and Equifax.
- Shares of Guidewire Software rose during the period as the company reported fourth quarter and full-year fiscal 2024 results that exceeded expectations. Revenue increased by 8% in both the quarter as well as for the full-year driven by strong cloud sales. Annual recurring revenue was fully ramped as well and management issued optimistic guidance, ahead of expectations, for the first quarter and full-year 2025. Shares of Trupanion declined during the period due to the company announcing that anxiety claims are on the rise and hit a record high in 2023 where the company had to pay out 21,180 claims up from 12,178 claims from 2019 to 2023.

FUND POSITIONING AND OUTLOOK

After a challenging first half of 2024, fintech equities rebounded sharply during 3Q, outperforming both the broader market and the tech sector by a wide margin. Financial software and payment providers drove performance for the group. Expectations for a continued decline in interest rates, early signs of companies earning an ROI on AI investments demonstrated during 2Q earnings, and profit taking in the early-stage AI beneficiaries (i.e. leading chip companies) drove strong relative performance in the software sector. Strength in payments was driven by stronger-than-anticipated 2Q results for several of the leading payment companies, a market rotation back into higher quality companies during a choppy tech environment, and valuation support after a period of multiple compression.

Despite the rebound during 3Q, we are mindful that year-to-date underperformance for fintech equities has been challenging for investors and understand why some may question the structural outlook for the asset class. Excitement around the industry has waned as IPO markets have shuttered and M&A activity has slowed amidst a changing rate and macro environment. The exuberance around generative AI has overwhelmed other investment themes, including fintech, and the beneficiaries thus far have been limited to the leading GPU, infrastructure and LLM providers.

While AI investments are delaying decision making when it comes to technology upgrades at leading financial services providers, we ultimately believe it will be a significant tailwind for providers of financial software. We believe the industry is well positioned to continue to ramp up and capitalize on AI products and applications at both the consumer and enterprise level and see continued opportunity for massive productivity and efficiency gains through utilization of this technology. Examples include, but are not limited to, credit decisioning, fraud detection, customer service (chatbots), inventory management, process automation, dynamic pricing, advertising, and consumer and small business applications (AI to help solve tax, accounting, cashflow, investing and other personal finance problems).

At the end of the period, our largest overweights were financials and industrials. We were most underweight to health care, communication services and consumer staples, all of which we had no exposure to. From a regional perspective, our largest overweight was North America, and we were most underweight to Emerging Markets, which we had no exposure to.

PAST PERFORMANCE DOES NOT PREDICT FUTURE RETURNS. AN INVESTMENT CAN LOSE VALUE.

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