



# Artisan US Value Equity Fund

QUARTERLY  
Commentary

Artisan Partners Global Funds plc

As of 31 December 2019

For Institutional Investors Only — Not for Onward Distribution

## Investment Process

We seek to invest in companies that are undervalued, in solid financial condition and have attractive business economics. We believe that companies with these characteristics are less likely to experience eroding values over the long term.

### Attractive Valuation

We value a business using what we believe are reasonable expectations for the long-term earnings power and capitalization rates of that business. This results in a range of values for the company that we believe would be reasonable. We generally will purchase a security if the stock price falls below or toward the lower end of that range.

### Sound Financial Condition

We prefer companies with an acceptable level of debt and positive cash flow. At a minimum, we seek to avoid companies that have so much debt that management may be unable to make decisions that would be in the best interest of the companies' shareholders.

### Attractive Business Economics

We favor cash-producing businesses that we believe are capable of earning acceptable returns on capital over the company's business cycle.

## Team Overview

Everyone on the team functions as a generalist with respect to investment research and the entire team works together on considering potential investments.

## Portfolio Management



James C. Kieffer, CFA  
Portfolio Manager



Thomas A. Reynolds IV  
Portfolio Manager



Daniel L. Kane, CFA  
Portfolio Manager



Craig Inman, CFA  
Portfolio Manager

## Investment Results (%)

As of 31 December 2019	Average Annual Total Returns						
	QTD	YTD	1 Yr	3 Yr	5 Yr	10 Yr	Inception
<b>Class I USD—Inception: 07 Jun 2013</b>	<b>7.98</b>	<b>29.18</b>	<b>29.18</b>	<b>8.33</b>	<b>8.00</b>	—	<b>8.20</b>
Russell 1000® Value Index (USD)	7.41	26.54	26.54	9.68	8.29	—	10.25
Russell 1000® Index (USD)	9.04	31.43	31.43	15.05	11.48	—	13.00
<b>Class A USD—Inception: 30 May 2014</b>	<b>7.77</b>	<b>28.21</b>	<b>28.21</b>	<b>7.53</b>	<b>7.21</b>	—	<b>5.95</b>
Russell 1000® Value Index (USD)	7.41	26.54	26.54	9.68	8.29	—	8.78
Russell 1000® Index (USD)	9.04	31.43	31.43	15.05	11.48	—	11.73

## Annual Returns (%) 12 months ended 31 December

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Class I USD</b>	<b>-9.46</b>	<b>27.66</b>	<b>16.14</b>	<b>-15.26</b>	<b>29.18</b>

Source: Artisan Partners/Russell. Returns for periods less than one year are not annualized.

**Past performance does not guarantee and is not a reliable indicator of future results.** Performance is NAV to NAV, including reinvestment of dividends and capital gains, if any, and is net of fees and expenses, excluding any subscription or redemption charges which may be levied. At the moment, the Fund does not intend to charge subscription or redemption fees. The Fund may be offered in different share classes, which are subject to different fees, expenses and inception dates (which may affect performance), have different minimum investment requirements and are entitled to different services. An investor cannot invest directly in an index.

**Investment Risks:** Investments will rise and fall with market fluctuations and investor capital is at risk. Investors investing in funds denominated in non-local currency should be aware of the risk of currency exchange fluctuations that may cause a loss of principal. These risks, among others, are further described on the last page, which should be read in conjunction with this material.



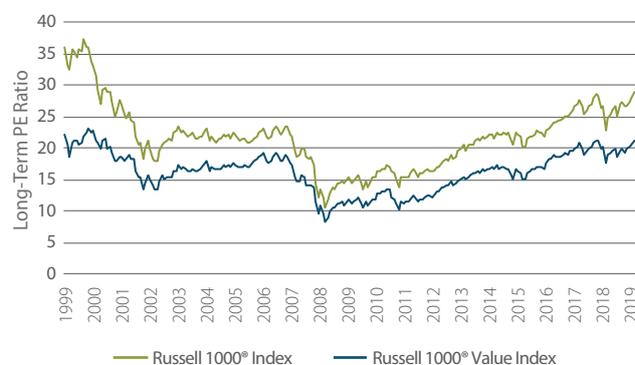
### Investing Environment

As you may know from reading our past letters, we are bottom-up stock pickers. We look for companies that have attractive business economics, are of sound financial condition and are attractively valued. These margin of safety criteria define our disciplined value investing style. The fundamental analysis at the core of our process keeps us focused on knowing a business—its management, its industry, its financial returns and capital profile and its prospects for delivering value to shareholders over time. From this perspective, the broader investing environment is often less important—and often less predictable—to us than any of the particular drivers of a business. For us, the investing context matters in a couple specific ways. First, macroeconomic and geopolitical issues can affect how a company's management makes strategic decisions. Slowing secular growth trends, ultra-easy central banks, negative interest rates, global trade wars and national elections all factor into that. Of course, we keep an eye on these issues as part of our fundamental analytical work, but we rarely ever use these factors as filters to narrow our investable universe or select a holding for the portfolio. In fact, we seek to capitalize on the fear other investors have when assessing these macro factors. The other, more salient way the market environment matters to us is in valuations.

As dedicated active managers, we'll never look at a historically high P/E ratio and declare the whole thing too rich, close Excel, cancel the Value Line subscription, pack it in and go home. We are humbled by the trust our clients have in us, and we relish the challenge of providing strong absolute returns through whatever market environment prevails.

Exhibit 1 illustrates the post-crisis evolution of P/E multiples, using a long-term P/E ratio. After the sharp sell-off in December 2018, valuations surged, reaching some of the highest levels since the dot-com bubble burst. Whether future earnings continue to support multiples at these levels is, of course, unknown. But what we do know is that being disciplined on valuations increases the probabilities of success when it comes to generating alpha over the long run.

Exhibit 1: Higher Prices on Slower Earnings Growth



Source: Artisan Partners/Russell/Bloomberg. As of 31 Dec 2019. Long-term price to earnings ratio is based on averaging the trailing ten years of earnings-per-share, adjusted for inflation. Past performance does not guarantee future results.

Overall, equity markets delivered stellar returns in 2019, with the S&P 500® Index up 31.5%, which stacks up well against the 90-year average annual return of 9.4%. Among the Russell family of indices, large-cap growth and mid-cap growth beat both the core and value versions, with value lagging by a considerable margin. This pattern has persisted for 7 out of the last 10 years. With earnings growth declining, returns have been driven by multiple expansion, and investors have been more and more willing to pay up for companies that can produce earnings growth, with a less discerning eye in assessing the quality of that growth.

### Performance Discussion

The Russell 1000® Value Index returned 7.4% in Q4 and finished the year up 26.5%. The financials, health care and industrials sectors were the index's top contributors; real estate was the only sector to post negative total returns.

Our portfolio outpaced the benchmark in Q4, led by stock-picking in the consumer staples and technology sectors. By avoiding the utilities sector altogether, we have added to relative performance. Materials and financials sector holdings detracted from relative returns.

Consumer electronics giant Apple was our top contributor in Q4 and for the whole year, returning 31.5% and 88.9% respectively. At the end of 2018, investors were concerned about Apple's sales in China and a slowing iPhone product cycle. As these fears rose to the surface, the falling asking price allowed investors to buy a stake in an extraordinary cash-producing company at around 11X earnings. As the year progressed, the market could not ignore Apple's return of capital to shareholders and the growing likelihood of a strong iPhone cycle in the years to come as 5G is rolled out globally. With the market's improved enthusiasm for Apple's prospects, we have trimmed into strength but continue to own a stake in the business due to Apple's cash-generating capabilities, sound balance sheet and ability to innovate existing hardware products while growing services revenues.

Financials was a top performing sector in Q4, and global financial services holding company Citigroup was a top performer in our portfolio. The market has been overly critical of this name in our view but is now recognizing this global bank is cheap relative to peers and on track for strong return-on-equity performance. By continuing to be disciplined on expenses, even slight revenue improvements can lead to improving returns on tangible equity. Lower tax rates haven't hurt, either. The company is highly diversified by region and product, which can create sentiment headwinds or tailwinds but which over the long term should serve as a benefit. Citi has built one of the strongest balance sheets among all international banks—coupled with the prudent amounts of diversification we expect, this should help build intrinsic value over time.

Another top contributor was tobacco products marketer and manufacturer Altria. Before we added it to the portfolio in Q3,

Altria's share price had been cut nearly in half from its all-time high. More recently, the weakness compounded thanks in part to a failed merger with Philip Morris, as well as the rapidly evolving regulatory environment around e-cigarettes. In 2018, Altria took a 35% stake in Juul, a startup synonymous with the e-cigarette market. At our purchase price, we believe Altria's investment in Juul was being ascribed little to no value by investors. What's more, prospects of an FDA ban on flavored e-cigarette cartridges may actually benefit market-leading Juul—at least on a relative basis. Altria also owns 10% of Anheuser-Busch InBev. Using a sum-of-parts approach, we believe the market gave us a large margin of safety when we purchased Altria in Q3. The shares have recovered since purchase as regulatory concerns have started abating and investors are focusing again on the extraordinary cash-producing capabilities of Altria's core cigarette and oral tobacco products.

NXP Semiconductors—one of the two dominant suppliers of semiconductors to the automotive industry and one of the top-five suppliers of analog semiconductors for general industrial uses—benefited from better-than-expected Q3 earnings. Semiconductors more broadly performed well in Q4. While NXP's exposures to the auto sector may create headwinds not faced by other manufacturers, strong margin improvements and significant free cash flow have reassured investors NXP will likely weather the current downturn and come out of it even stronger.

Of our portfolio holdings, seven had negative total returns in Q4. Top detractor DuPont was down 9.5% on concerns over pending legislation and litigation related to hazardous chemical disposal practices. Because the alleged problems are the responsibility of Chemours, a DuPont spin-off, indemnification agreements ought to limit potential losses. However, DuPont nonetheless expects to incur some costs and expenses related to any litigation. In addition to litigation fears, the lingering macroeconomic impact of the trade war has weighed on DuPont's end markets. Supporting the stock at year end was an agreement with International Flavors & Fragrances to purchase DuPont's nutrition and biosciences businesses.

Automobile retailer AutoNation was a detractor in Q4. Distinct from the cyclical pressures globally for autos, the US car market is in a relatively better position. The car dealer business isn't growing rapidly, but it remains a good business, generating a lot of cash and creating worthwhile returns on capital. We think an underappreciated aspect of auto retailing is its variable cost model which allows the business to stay highly profitable through the cycle. The predictable, high-margin parts and service business is growing as well, due to rising auto complexity. In addition, shareholders appreciated recent C-suite changes, and the company's renewed emphasis on cost controls has supported the margin-focused efforts—a welcome surprise for investors.

In addition to DuPont and AutoNation, multinational networking and business communications conglomerate Cisco Systems was a notable detractor from relative returns in Q4. The business is facing cyclical headwinds. Near-term order growth is flattening as corporate IT spend appears to be slowing, and various challenges are affecting the company's different business segments. On top of this, management recently lowered guidance, and the market has

re-rated the stock. Yet we believe Cisco remains a compelling investment given its undemanding multiple, management's credible commitment to address costs, a net cash balance sheet and a product portfolio that looks well-positioned for retaining industry prominence.

### Portfolio Activity

We added one name to the portfolio in Q4: Philip Morris International.

In addition to Q3 purchase Altria, we initiated a position in tobacco company Philip Morris International in Q4. Largely due to regulatory uncertainty, tobacco company multiples have fallen precipitously. Philip Morris was viewed as less exposed to US regulatory concerns than peers, so when news broke that Altria and Philip Morris were exploring a possible merger, investors reacted negatively and put pressure on Philip Morris shares. When combined with our constructive view of Altria, we were able to take advantage of the selling and add a diversified global tobacco business at a compelling valuation. By virtue of its globally known brands, Philip Morris is the best-in-class operator with a well-diversified business, particularly by geography. Next-generation heat-not-burn product IQOS is growing rapidly and shows great promise as consumers continue migrating to safer tobacco delivery systems. Looking at Philip Morris through our margin-of-safety criteria, the business trades for an undemanding valuation and has extraordinary business economics and a strong credit profile.

### Perspective

Our portfolio construction is rooted in a conscientious, risk-aware stock selection process that emphasizes margin of safety. The result is a stable of stocks that looks very different from the index. We believe these companies are differentiated because of the sensible way they deploy and allocate capital, the strength of their balance sheets and how they run the businesses for long-term value creation. We want to be aligned with these types of companies, especially at this point in the cycle when elevated prices pervade.

Despite recent headwinds to our style and strategy, we have continued to stick to our philosophy of owning better businesses with solid balance sheets that are trading at cheaper valuations. While there are many areas of the market that are quite uninteresting from a valuation perspective, there are also some priced with substantive margins of safety due to the effects of cyclicity and controversy. Our ability to look through negative fluctuations in investor sentiment and focus on the health of the business is what makes our process time-tested and relevant.

For more information: Visit [www.artisanpartners.com](http://www.artisanpartners.com)

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