



# Artisan Floating Rate Strategy

QUARTERLY  
Commentary

As of 30 June 2023

## Investment Process

We seek to invest in issuers with high-quality business models that have compelling risk-adjusted return characteristics. Our research process has four primary pillars:

### Business Quality

We use a variety of sources to understand an issuer's business model resiliency. We analyze the general health of the industry in which an issuer operates, the issuer's competitive position, the dynamics of industry participants and the decision-making history of the issuer's management.

### Financial Strength and Flexibility

We believe that analyzing the history and trend of free cash flow generation is critical to understanding an issuer's financial health. Our financial analysis also considers an issuer's capital structure, refinancing options, financial covenants, amortization schedules and overall financial transparency.

### Downside Analysis

We believe that credit instruments by their nature have an asymmetric risk profile. The risk of loss is often greater than the potential for gain, particularly when looking at below investment grade issuers. We seek to manage this risk with what we believe to be conservative financial projections that account for industry position, competitive dynamics and positioning within the capital structure.

### Value Identification

We use multiple metrics to determine the value of an investment opportunity. We look for credit improvement potential, relative value within an issuer's capital structure, catalysts for business improvement and potential value stemming from market or industry dislocations.

## Team Overview

Our team brings together a group of experienced credit analysts who are dedicated to a single investment philosophy and process. All team members conduct deep fundamental credit research as generalists with sector tendencies to identify issuers with high quality business models that have compelling risk-adjusted return characteristics.

## Portfolio Management



Bryan C. Krug, CFA  
Portfolio Manager (Lead)



Seth B. Yeager, CFA  
Portfolio Manager

## Investment Results (% USD)

As of 30 June 2023	Average Annual Total Returns						
	QTD	YTD	1 Yr	3 Yr	5 Yr	10 Yr	Inception <sup>1</sup>
<b>Composite — Gross</b>	<b>3.30</b>	<b>6.96</b>	<b>11.09</b>	—	—	—	<b>4.04</b>
<b>Composite — Net</b>	<b>3.12</b>	<b>6.60</b>	<b>10.34</b>	—	—	—	<b>3.34</b>
Credit Suisse Leveraged Loan Index	3.12	6.33	10.10	—	—	—	3.45

## Annual Returns (% USD) 12 months ended 30 June

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Composite — Net</b>	—	—	—	—	<b>10.34</b>

Source: Artisan Partners/Credit Suisse. Returns for periods less than one year are not annualized. <sup>1</sup>Composite inception: 1 January 2022.

Past performance does not guarantee and is not a reliable indicator of future results. Current performance may be lower or higher than the performance shown. Composite performance has been presented in both gross and net of investment management fees.

**Investment Risks:** Investments will rise and fall with market fluctuations and investor capital is at risk. Investors investing in strategies 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.



### Performance Discussion

Our portfolio outpaced the Credit Suisse Leveraged Loan Index during Q2. The portfolio's sector mix was the largest contributor to outperformance, though credit selection was decidedly positive, as well. Across sectors, our focus on full-cycle business models results in a relative overweight to less cyclical software, services and insurance holdings. This exposure held up better throughout the quarter's volatility as economically sensitive credit risk underperformed on global growth concerns. Elsewhere, this relative strength was somewhat offset by the portfolio's small out-of-benchmark exposure to high yield bonds. This allocation provides total return and liquidity benefits, but it modestly weighed on returns as floating rate securities outperformed fixed-rate bonds during the period. As we look ahead, we believe our focused approach to credit selection will be a clear differentiator and will help us navigate the wide range of outcomes that could unfold over the coming quarters.

### Investing Environment

Credit markets concluded their worst first half-year performance on record in Q2, as building concerns of a slowing economy led to widespread decompression. Credit assets were notably weaker across the board, but the rationale was distinctly different than in Q1. Through the first few months of the year, the drawdown across credit was primarily the function of a selloff in interest rates. Repricing of credit risk was the main contributor to losses in Q2. The macro backdrop of tightening financial conditions, sequentially slowing growth and 40-year highs in inflation led to a quick erosion of risk appetites as investors began to price in expectations for a slowdown. Widespread risk aversion translated into materially wider credit valuations with spreads reaching their widest levels since the pandemic. For example, the spread between BB and single-B rated loans widened through their long-term average to 198bps from 134bps at the end of Q1.

Leveraged loans, which have been largely immune from the year's volatility, succumbed to risk-off price action but held up materially better than both investment grade and high yield bonds during the quarter. Still, the 4.4% decline in loans in Q2 (as measured by the Credit Suisse Leveraged Loan Index) marked the worst quarter of performance since Q1 2020. The weakening economic backdrop accelerated outflows across the loan space as investors' fixation with higher interest rates and surging inflation earlier in the year gave way to broader concerns about the economy later in the quarter. Despite weakness, loans remain one of the best performing segments across both equity and fixed income asset classes.

Loan valuations for the index finished the quarter with spreads through 600bps and yields exceeding 9.0%. Even with fears of an impending recession, valuations still sit inside prior periods of economic contraction. Nonetheless, growing pockets of stress/distress were evident across several capital structures and economically vulnerable industries. With tighter credit conditions, borrowing has become constrained for many lower rated issuers with

large concessions required for borrowers needing to access capital markets. For our approach that capitalizes on dislocations, we view these situations as an increasingly attractive area for capital deployment.

Defaults were only modestly higher from the cyclically low levels at the start of the year. The quarter saw six issuers default on \$6 billion in loans, pushing the 12-month loan default rate 30bps higher to 0.7%. Even with growing distress, the number of loans trading below \$80 is largely in line with where it was before the pandemic. Defaults are expected to rise from near record lows, but borrowers are in a much better position to weather a downturn than in past cycles. The last two years of record refinancing have pushed out any near-term maturity wall that would increase the odds of liquidity-driven default activity. Only 6.5% of the par amount outstanding within the index, either unrated or rated B or lower, is scheduled to mature over the next two years. At the same time, leverage is at pre-pandemic levels, and interest coverage is at its post-crisis highs. This suggests we're unlikely to see a widespread default wave like previous downturns.

### Portfolio Positioning

We took steps during the quarter to position the portfolio for a backdrop of continued volatility and economic uncertainty by incrementally upgrading exposures across sectors and ratings. The strong bid for floating rate securities early in the quarter allowed us to pare some of the portfolio's lower rated and second-lien exposure into technical strength. With widespread volatility and resulting dispersion later in the quarter, we directed these proceeds into less cyclical, shorter maturity loans that were trading at attractive dollar discounts. We also incrementally added to the portfolio's non-loan exposure through new investments in a handful of first-lien, short-duration high yield bond investments. While yields between bonds and loans are largely the same, the average high yield bond now trades with dollar prices in the low 80s, compared to the average loans in the low 90s. This discount translates into attractive convexity and an opportunity to capture returns in excess of a bond's coupon. Together, these moves pushed the portfolio's BB-rated exposure higher by 3.5 percentage points to 13.3% while the portfolio's maturity profile shortened more than a half a year to 4.3 years.

Across sectors, the portfolio became incrementally more defensive. We continue to focus the portfolio on industries that generate strong free cash flow and have a unique ability to weather future volatility, in our view. Given inflationary pressures and higher financing costs, we've incrementally moved the portfolio away from consumer-related areas and have concentrated a third of the portfolio in software, services and insurance sectors—areas that tend to have high business quality and show resiliency throughout an economic cycle.

We believe our insurance brokerage holdings, in particular, are well positioned to navigate the crosscurrents of the current environment. Because third-party insurance brokers earn a percentage of the premiums collected on behalf of insurance carriers, the non-

discretionary nature of many insurance products—often required by law for both consumers and businesses—results in more than 90% recurring revenues and limited voluntary customer churn. More notably, the impact of surging inflation has created a hard-pricing environment of higher insured asset prices, rising claims costs and, in turn, rising premiums that directly translate into higher brokerage commission revenues. As a result, insurance brokers operate with a high margin, high free cash flow business model that is relatively defensive despite a higher leverage profile. Currently 13% of the portfolio is allocated to insurance brokers that offer high single-digit yields—attractive risk/reward for full-cycle credit risk.

The analysis is similar for our software holdings, too. Nearly 20% of the portfolio is allocated to software companies that provide mission-critical products and services through subscription-based revenue models. Like insurance brokers, enterprise software providers benefit from high retention rates (90%–95%), high gross margins and attractive profitability at scale. While software companies typically have incrementally less pricing power during recessionary environments, customer attrition is typically reduced due to limited competition across niche verticals.

An example of one of the portfolio's software holdings that characterizes our approach to the sector is our position in the leveraged loan of SS&C Technologies—a new name in the portfolio's top 10 largest issuers. SS&C is a leading software provider, specializing in fund administration and accounting for the investment management industry. The company benefits from its large scale, competitive positioning and revenue predictability. Nearly 90% of its revenues come from recurring, transaction-based services that are provided to its large and diverse client base. From a credit standpoint, we view SS&C as a higher quality holding and part of our intra-quarter rotation. We believe this more defensive position is likely to be a source of funds as better opportunities for yield and total return emerge.

### Perspective

As we move into the second half of the year, it's undeniable the credit landscape is dramatically different from the one just six months ago. Soaring inflation and tightening financial conditions now characterize an environment where investors' recession outlook has moved from bear case to base case. We can confidently say credit fundamentals are in a much stronger place today to weather a downturn than in past cycles. Fortunately for investors, a worsening macro picture has been met with a much better set of valuations. Dispersion is widespread, and pricing between industries and capital structures has become increasingly differentiated. In our view, this has created the most attractive opportunity set for credit selection we've seen since the depths of the pandemic. Of course, we acknowledge credit markets remain vulnerable to shifts in sentiment, and it's possible spreads could continue to widen from here. But for investors with a longer time frame, current valuations have historically led to compelling forward returns. With this in mind, we've positioned the

portfolio to navigate the wide range of outcomes that could unfold over the coming quarters and expect the continued uptick in dispersion to create attractive opportunities for credit selection.

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**Investment Risks:** Fixed income securities carry interest rate risk and credit risk for both the issuer and counterparty and investors may lose principal value. In general, when interest rates rise, fixed income values fall. High income securities (junk bonds) are speculative, experience greater price volatility and have a higher degree of credit and liquidity risk than bonds with a higher credit rating. The portfolio typically invests a significant portion of its assets in lower-rated high income securities (e.g., CCC). Loans carry risks including insolvency of the borrower, lending bank or other intermediary. Loans may be secured, unsecured, or not fully collateralized, trade infrequently, experience delayed settlement, and be subject to resale restrictions. Private placement and restricted securities may not be easily sold due to resale restrictions and are more difficult to value. Use of derivatives may create investment leverage and increase the likelihood of volatility and risk of loss in excess of the amount invested. International investments involve special risks, including currency fluctuation, lower liquidity, different accounting methods and economic and political systems, and higher transaction costs. These risks typically are greater in emerging and less developed markets, including frontier markets. These risks, among others, are further described in Artisan Partners Form ADV, which is available upon request.

Unless otherwise indicated, the Artisan Strategy characteristics relate to that of an investment composite or a representative account managed within a composite. It is intended to provide a general illustration of the investment strategy and considerations used by Artisan Partners in managing that strategy. Individual accounts may differ, at times significantly, from the reference data shown due to varying account restrictions, fees and expenses, and since-inception time periods, among others. Where applicable, this information is supplemental to, and not to be construed with, a current or prospective client's investment account information. References to individual security performance relate to a representative account in the composite. Individual holding periods may differ.

For the purpose of determining the portfolio's holdings, securities of the same issuer are aggregated to determine the weight in the Strategy. The holdings mentioned above comprised the following percentages of a representative account within the Artisan Floating Rate Strategy Composite's total net assets as of 30 Jun 2023: SS&C Technologies Inc 3.7%. Securities named in the Commentary, but not listed here are not held in the portfolio as of the date of this report. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Attribution is used to evaluate the investment management decisions which affected the portfolio's performance when compared to a benchmark index. Attribution is not exact, but should be considered an approximation of the relative contribution of each of the factors considered.

Net-of-fees composite returns were calculated using the highest model investment advisory fees applicable to portfolios within the composite. Fees may be higher for certain pooled vehicles and the composite may include accounts with performance-based fees. All performance results are net of commissions and transaction costs, and have been presented gross and net of investment advisory fees. Dividend income is recorded net of foreign withholding taxes on ex-dividend date or as soon after the ex-dividend date as the information becomes available to Artisan Partners. Interest income is recorded on the accrual basis. Performance results for the Index include reinvested dividends and are presented net of foreign withholding taxes but, unlike the portfolio's returns, do not reflect the payment of sales commissions or other expenses incurred in the purchase or sale of the securities included in the indices.

Credit Suisse (CS) Leveraged Loan Index is an unmanaged market value-weighted index designed to mirror the investable universe of the US dollar-denominated leveraged loan market. New issues are added to the index on their effective date if they qualify according to the following criteria: loan facilities must be rated "BB" or lower; only fully funded term loan facilities are included; and issuers must be domiciled in developed countries. The index(es) are unmanaged; include net reinvested dividends; do not reflect fees or expenses; and are not available for direct investment.

This summary represents the views of the portfolio manager as of 30 Jun 2023. Those views and portfolio holdings are subject to change and Artisan Partners disclaims any obligation to advise investors of such changes. The discussion of portfolio holdings does not constitute a recommendation of any individual security.

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