

MLC-Platinum Global Fund

QUARTERLY REPORT

PERFORMANCE (AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2005)

Fund Size: \$3.5bn	Last Quarter	Last 12 months	5 years (compound pa)	Since Inception (compound pa)
MLC-Platinum Global Fund	9.9%	20.9%	8.9%	15.4%
Morgan Stanley Capital International All Country World Net Index (A\$)	7.6%	18.4%	-2.6%	8.0%

Source: MLC Investments Limited and Platinum

As the year progressed, the pace of the Fund's appreciation quickened. Performance in the first half was marred by one third of the Fund being committed to Japan, a market which declined slightly until June. At that time we commented that, "both our mechanistic and qualitative work suggests that Japan is and remains the most attractive of the large equity markets."

Fortunately, our thorough methodology has paid off but it stands as a warning to those of our investors who would prefer to play with the in-crowd of momentum managers. Please do assess whether Platinum offers the sort of management style that you feel comfortable with over the long term. We would be astonished if there were not periods of underperformance in the future as

a consequence of our contrarian approach to investing.

The accompanying table gives a hint of the opportunities offered by markets during the year. Conspicuous were the companies of the emerging markets which enjoyed both strong earnings growth and a further re-rating, hence the remarkable returns. Among the developed markets, Japan led, followed by the Europeans, and the US brought up the rear with a return barely matching the cash rate. For your interest, the table shows the 12 month and three month performance in native currencies, US\$, as well as A\$ to highlight the importance of currency movements this past year.

MSCI* World Index Country Performance (Native, USD and AUD)

Country	1 Year			Quarter		
	Native	USD	AUD	Native	USD	AUD
Korea	53%	57%	68%	12%	15%	20%
Japan	45%	26%	34%	17%	12%	16%
India	42%	38%	47%	11%	8%	13%
Brazil	38%	56%	67%	7%	1%	6%
Germany	27%	10%	18%	7%	4%	9%
France	27%	10%	17%	3%	1%	5%
Australia	24%	16%	24%	3%	-1%	3%
UK	20%	7%	15%	3%	0%	4%
Hong Kong	8%	8%	16%	-3%	-3%	1%
US	5%	5%	12%	2%	2%	6%

Source: Factset

*Morgan Stanley Capital International All Country World Net Index



A National Company

MLC-Platinum

MSCI* World Index Industry Performance (AUD)

Sector	1 Year	Quarter
Energy	40%	-2%
Materials	29%	12%
Utilities	22%	2%
Industrials	20%	11%
Financials	20%	12%
Health Care	17%	6%
Consumer Staples	14%	5%
Information Technology	14%	10%
Consumer Discretionary	9%	8%
Telecommunications	1%	0%

Source: Factset

*Morgan Stanley Capital International All Country World Net Index

It is no surprise that energy and materials once again led the markets in terms of industry categorisation. The outliers were utilities which have benefited from low interest rates and consumer discretionary, perhaps anticipating a less robust consumer. It is interesting to note how energy and utilities went off the boil in the fourth quarter.

Against these various opportunities, there were areas where we could have done better, most notably in currencies but overall our returns were acceptable. The Fund outperformed the MSCI index by 2% over both the year and the quarter, earning 20.9% and 9.9% respectively.

CURRENCY

At this time last year we fretted about the one-sided view the market had against the US\$ and chose to tentatively own some. However, as has happened in the past when there is a conflict between a strategic view and a tactical view, we tend to make rather limp concessions in favour of tactical arguments. This has been costly, made all the more so by our misreading of the attraction of the yen being used as a source of cheap funding for asset speculation. The consequence was that we were positioned about 160 degrees out of sync.

By the fourth quarter, the change in the tempo of the currency markets suggested a diffident swing in sentiment against the almost certain bet of borrowing cheaply in euros and yen. The yen clawed back some 3% against the US\$, and given our view that the outlook for world growth is relatively benign, we hedged some yen into Australian dollars.

At present, we are ambivalent about exchange rates, mostly holding the underlying assets in their native currencies. To the extent we hold US\$ investments or cash, these are hedged into Australian dollars. In this instance we are suggesting that the benefits that the US\$ derives from its reserve currency status approximately matches the benefit that the A\$ derives from the current commodity boom. In neither case is an argument being made against the fact that both nations are living beyond their means. This position will remain under close scrutiny.

CHANGES TO THE PORTFOLIO

Disposition of Assets (Net Invested Position)

Region	Dec 2005	Sep 2005
Japan	31.9%	33.7%
Western Europe	25.5%	26.6%
Other (emerging markets eg. Korea)	12.7%	12.5%
North America*	12.5%	7.5%
Australia*	-1.2%	-1.3%
Cash	18.6%	21.0%

Source: MLC Investments Limited

* At 31 December 2005, the Fund has a short position in the US against the Standard & Poor's 500 Index of 3.3% and the Russell 2000 Index of 4.4%; and in Australia against the SPI 200 Index of 1.2%.

In this period we continued the pattern of disposals seen in the third quarter. Namely, selling down across the board in India, and completing the sale of Seoul Broadcasting, Daewoo International and Samsung Securities in Korea; Linde, Deutsche Post, Alleanza Assicurazioni in Europe; and Fuji Electric, NSK, IHI, Credit Saison, and Aiful in Japan. New sales

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were initiated to reduce our holdings in the Toyota group of companies and to exit Falconbridge.

Fortune favoured us regarding Falconbridge. After Brascan sold its remaining 20% to Xstrata there was the risk of the latter gaining creeping control without fully paying shareholders for the extremely interesting mineral assets of the group. Fortunately the CEO, who was truly concerned about all shareholders, adroitly engineered a merger with Inco which saw the share price lift from \$C24 to \$C34 a share.

As mentioned last quarter, many sales do not necessarily reflect the full value of the companies but as they had each appreciated considerably since our entry, they were no longer compelling *investments*. Take Toyota Motor for example. We think it is indisputably the world's leading auto manufacturer, however, it has nearly doubled in price in 22 months, and regular readers will know that the now publicised problems at both Ford and GM were among the issues we considered when buying the shares at the outset. With these problems now clear to all, it is not the time to give them undue emphasis. We strongly believe Toyota will be the largest auto company soon and probably remain the most

profitable. However, our job entails appraising the relative merits of great companies and great investments: the difference residing in price!

Purchases included adding to the Japanese regional banks, which we believe are incredibly cheap against all comers if one believes that interest rates will rise in Japan as an inevitable consequence of economic normality. We also bought a holding in Livedoor, a stockbroker-come-internet portal. Additions were made to the paper and packaging manufacturers; to the fallen angels of the drug world, Merck and Pfizer; and to longer held positions such as Henkel (packaged consumer goods and industrial solutions), Carrefour (the world's second largest retailer) and Credit Agricole (France's leading financial intermediary).

The road is never paved with gold, however. A recent purchase of Germany's pay-TV operator Premiere AG, before the outcome of the bidding for the broadcast rights for the *Bundesliga* domestic football contest, saw the share price collapse on the announcement of their having been outbid by a cable rival. The shares have recovered somewhat but it will be interesting to see how they try to solve their dilemma for programming content. They are not without choices we believe.

Breakdown of Platinum's long investments by Industry

Categories	Examples of Stocks	Dec 2005	Sep 2005
Cyclicals/Manufacturing	Toyota Industries, Schindler, Siemens, HHI, International Paper	29%	31%
Financials	Credit Agricole, Sumitomo Mitsui Insurance, Samsung Fire & Marine	15%	15%
Technology/Hardware	Agere, Infineon Tech, Samsung, AMD, Sun Microsystems	11%	10%
Retail/Services/Logistics	Hornbach, Carrefour, Mitsubishi Corp	9%	10%
Software/Media	Liberty Media, Premiere AG, News Corp	6%	5%
Consumer Brands	Henkel, Lotte, Beiersdorf	5%	5%
Gold and Other Resources	Shell, Barrick Gold, Newmont Mining	5%	7%
Telecoms	Alcatel, SK Telecom	5%	5%
Medical	Pfizer, Merck & Co, Schering, GlaxoSmithKline	5%	5%

Source: Platinum

ort (Continued)

COMMENTARY

It is seldom pretty to look back at the **supposed certainties** of 12 months earlier. The current “certainties” seem to be that the world will grow at a reasonable pace (with the hitherto leaders slowing and the laggards gaining pace), that inflation will remain subdued, and that short term interest rates are consequently not likely to lift much. This leaves investors extremely comfortable as indicated by the published bull to bear ratios and the low implied price of option volatility. “Certainties” have the knack of reducing one’s critical faculties and we are no exception.

We do know, however, that much of the **present propitious mood is the direct result of a concerted central bank bail-out**. There is easy money everywhere with real short term interest rates varying between slightly negative, as in Asia, to barely positive in the euro area and up to 2% elsewhere. Even in the popularly declared sick economy of Europe, this has induced loan growth of over 9% year-on-year. We therefore continue to favour the case for a world of more balanced growth, assisted by Asia generating greater internal and inter-regional growth (note our comments in the September quarterly). In the meantime there is a crescendo of real asset speculation.

At the end of 2002 the high yield debt (“junk bond”) markets were illiquid and very unfashionable in the aftermath of Enron, Worldcom, and other disasters. As the US (and global) economies reflat, what was previously thought of as speculative debt became less speculative, allowing many companies to refinance. High yield debt was the best performing asset class in 2003 and 2004.

With performance came floods of money seeking “junk bonds” – and the interest rate differential between junk and government bonds shrunk to very low levels. High risk endeavours that would usually have to pay substantial interest rates

could borrow at trifling spreads over low yielding treasuries. Money was cheap and available.

If highly speculative adventures can be financed cheaply they probably will be, and in much of the world they are being pursued on a grand scale. *So-called private equity is the metamorphosis of the earlier fashion of leveraged buyouts (LBO).*

The private equity funds, which have attracted huge flows, try to take advantage of the difference in returns expected by the equity market and the junk bond market. If the assets purchased generate a higher gross cash flow (pre-tax) than currently low yielding junk bonds, an LBO can be made to work. Moreover, any business improvement belongs to the equity holders but the downside belongs disproportionately to the bond holders.

Some of the recent deals have been breathtaking. For example, the sale of the PanAmSat satellite data business owned by DirecTV (and controlled by Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp). News Corp sold the business to leveraged buyers for \$4.3 billion, \$3.75 billion of which was borrowed. The new owners only put up \$550 million. Months later PanAmSat borrowed a further \$250 million which was used to pay “dividends” to the equity investors, reducing their contribution to \$300 million. A few months later they floated the company and \$200 million of the proceeds were used to pay a second dividend to the equity investors, reducing their equity contribution to \$100 million. After the listing the initial shareholders held almost half of the company when, out of the blue, a bidder emerged to offer shareholders over \$3 billion. Needless to say, the new purchasers are financed yet again with junk bonds. Presumably Mr Murdoch, in a public auction, did not deliberately leave several billion dollars on the table!

The fact is that there is a round-about of hedge and private equity funds (that have mobilised savings from a sometimes unsophisticated public) to invest in all manner of asset classes that is reflexive by nature. ***Each buys from the other and ultimately relies on the public markets to provide the escape route.*** This hatch was diminutive in late 2002!

Nowhere is this activity more pronounced than in Australia where unsustainable “earnings” are being manufactured, levered and sold to the public in listed vehicles. Investors would be wise to compare declared earnings against gross revenues. In some instances they may discover that “earnings” exceed cash revenues (gross cash-in-the-door!!). These fantastic gymnastics are achieved by so-called “mark to model” revaluations, and dividends paid in part from “refinancing” gains.

The purchasers involved in these LBOs are often not the natural owners. They derive their income mainly from being paid a share of profits when the investment is on-sold. ***These assets are purchased to flick.*** However, to date, the assets have been easy to flick because there has almost always been another private equity fund or public market willing to buy them. The most common deals we see these days are no longer public to private transactions but transactions between private equity firms, generating each time another round of activity-inducing fees to managers, junk bond salesman and investment bankers.

An important element of this is the willingness of junk bond holders to hold ever-riskier debt. In this they have some support because the default rate on the junk debt issued in this cycle has been very low, helped by a benign economy and self reinforcing optimism (reflexivity).

As interest rates have risen in America, the heat in the private equity market has moved to

Europe where interest rates remain very low. This is also tending to drive-up the price of listed shares in Europe. Further, excess liquidity generated by the Bank of Japan is doing its share of work, finding expression in carry trades which make funds available globally to fuel the fire.

Yes, this does all sound familiar. In the 1980s, Michael Milken, through clever marketing and force of personality, convinced investors to hold *portfolios* of junk debt which were supposed to lessen risk. Some should have known better. He funded many highly speculative ventures some of which worked (being a great help to both Rupert Murdoch and Ted Turner) and many of which failed (for example Bond Corporation). In the end there were many losers (including life insurance companies that lost billions of dollars and failed): Milken had rearranged the financial landscape of America. His firm took enough fees to pay him over half a billion dollars in 1987. He went to prison too. It ended in tears for some, and great success for others. That is how this current wave of cheap money and leveraged transactions may also end.

CONCLUSION

In general we are in agreement with the widely-held optimism but the rampant speculation noted above does fill us with foreboding. Over the next 12 months one can expect periodic panics about growth, a fair degree of currency turbulence and perhaps a greater margin for error being applied to riskier assets. With this in mind we have been gradually shifting the portfolio away from highly successful areas to those which are less fashionable. Some of these new ideas carry timing risk but could be highly prospective. We are maintaining hedges on some market indices.

Kerr Neilson

Managing Director

If you have any questions about your investment in the MLC – Platinum Global Fund, please contact the MasterKey Service Centre on

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**Platinum Asset Management is the leading Australian based international fund manager.
For greater insight into our process, please visit our web site at www.platinum.com.au**

This document has been prepared by MLC Investments Limited (ABN 30 002 641 661), with fund and market commentary written by Platinum Asset Management Limited (ABN 25 063 565 006) and is current as at 31 December 2005. It is provided as an information service without assuming a duty of care. Accordingly, reliance should not be placed by anyone on this document as the basis for making any investment, financial or other decision. MLC Investments Limited is the issuer of both the MLC-Platinum Global Fund and the MLC MasterKey Unit Trust. The offer of interests in the MLC-Platinum Global Fund and the MLC MasterKey Unit Trust are contained in the MLC-Platinum Global Fund Product Disclosure Statement (PDS) and the MLC MasterKey Unit Trust PDS. Copies of which are available upon request by phoning the MasterKey Service Centre on 132 652 or on our website at mlc.com.au. Persons wishing to acquire units should obtain a PDS and consider that document before making any decision about whether to acquire or continue to hold the product. Persons wishing to acquire interests must complete the application form from the current PDS. An investment in the MLC-Platinum Global Fund or MLC MasterKey Unit Trust does not represent a deposit with or a liability of MLC Investments Limited, National Australia Bank Limited (ABN 12 004 044 937) or other member company of the National Group of companies and is subject to investment risk including possible delays in repayment and loss of income and capital invested. None of the National Australia Bank Limited, MLC Investments Limited, or any other member company in the National Group of companies or Platinum Asset Management, guarantee the repayment of capital, payment of income or the performance of the MLC-Platinum Global Fund or MLC MasterKey Unit Trust.