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| Painlevé, Jean (1902-1989) |
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| Jean Painlevé was a French scientist most famous for his documentary films about science and the natural world. He was the only son of French prime minister Paul Painlevé, himself a respected scientist. The younger Painlevé studied physics, chemistry, and biology at the Sorbonne, but he turned to filmmaking as a way of capturing aspects of scientific study that were visible no other way. His films were criticized by the French scientific establishment, which distrusted the medium as a whole, but beginning with *Œufs d'épinoche* [*The Stickleback’s Eggs: From Fertilization to* Hatching] (1928), Painlevé built a corpus of documentary films that attracted attention from intellectuals in other fields, including Marc Chagall, Man Ray, and Georges Bataille. Painlevé’s films found resonances between science and surrealism through a panoply of “trick” shots, using slow motion, whimsical music, and the patterns of nature to render the natural world strange. Painlevé was politically progressive throughout his life, and despite their ostensibly apolitical nature, Painlevé’s films are often perceived to be commentaries on the human world in which he lived. Painlevé claimed he chose the subject of *L’Hippocampe* [*The* Seahorse] (1934) because the male of the species bears the eggs, while *Les Assassins d’eau douce* [*Freshwater Assassins*] (1947) depicts the brutality of life in a pond that mirrors the brutality of the war France had just endured. Painlevé was active in the creation and promotion of the Institute of Scientific Cinema (ICS), which worked to promote science films, and he continued to produce films into the 1980s. |
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| Further reading:  (Bellows and McDougall) |